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MANIMEKALAI

(Second, revised and enlarged edition)

BY

A. S. PANCHAPAKESA AYYAR, M.A., I.C.S., Bar-at-law,
(Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature of the United Kingdom)

THE ALLIANCE COMPANY,
...RE : : MADRAS 4.

1947 [Price Two Rupees

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PREFACE

At the request of several friends, English and Indian, and especially some Mahratta and Hindi savants now deeply interested in Tamil thought, with which they were not familiar before, I have added in this edition brief summaries of the chief systems of philosophy current in the Tamil country eighteen hundred years ago, and expounded to Manimekalai. I had omitted these in the first edition as detracting from the story value of the book. But I now agree that, in a book mainly concerned with religion, philosophy and ethics, like the *Manimekalai*, it is only proper to give these topics adequate representation even at the cost of detracting from the story value.

The avidity with which the first editions of my "*Kovalan and Kannaki*" and "*Manimekalai*" were received by the public and the critics and scholars has been a source of immense pleasure to me, as a Tamilian, as showing the appeal of Tamil classics and thought to the world at large, and especially to the world of scholars and critics. I crave their indulgence for any errors and mistakes which might have crept into this book.

Vellore,
Deepavali,
Kaliyuga 5049.

A. S. P. Ayyar.

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INTRODUCTION.

The noble and moving story of *Manimekalai* is contained in the famous Tamil epic *Manimekalai*, dating from about the second century A. D. It is a continuation of another great epic, *Silappadikaram*, which narrates the story of Kovalan, the father of Manimekalai, and his wife, Kannaki, and mistress, Madhavi, the mother of Manimekalai. These two are the most celebrated of the five Tamil Epics. The other three are *Jeevakachintamani*, *Valaiyapati* and *Kundalakesi*, the last two existing only in fragments now, no complete manuscripts being available. All the three are more coloured than the *Silappadikaram* and *Manimekalai*, being akin to *Dasakumaracharitham*, *Kadambari* and *Kathasaritsagara* in this respect, and, therefore, far later, the seventh century A. D. being their approximate date. From the day the *Silappadikaram* and *Manimekalai* were published, till to-day, the Tamils have been rightly proud of these two Epics. The *Manimekalai* is more abstruse and philosophical, as it treats of a beautiful young maiden who prefers love divine to human love, and enters a convent at an age when maidens of her age would be entering wedlock. The *Silappadikaram*, on the other hand, treats of the married life of Kovalan and Kannaki, and then grapples with the problem of the eternal triangle caused by the entrance of Madhavi into Kovalan's life, almost

to the entire exclusion of Kannaki. That phase passes, and Kovalan returns to Kannaki, and is forgiven. Both then set out for Madura to start life anew, and meet with tragedy in its grimmest aspect. Kovalan is executed unjustly. Kannaki proves his innocence to the king; the King, Nedun Jeliyan, dies of shock at his unjust execution of Kovalan, and his Queen, Kopperundevi, dies at once, being unable to live without her beloved, like a true wife as described by Madhavi in the *Manimekalai*. The enraged Kannaki plucks off her left breast and hurls it at Madura city, invoking Agni, the god of Fire, to burn it down if she is really chaste and if her husband has been the victim of injustice. Madura is consigned to flames by Agni. Madurapati, the goddess of Madura, convinces Kannaki that her husband's death was due to his own bad *karma* in a previous birth, and that her burning down of Madura was not therefore, quite a just act. Kannaki then sadly goes west to Palni, Murugan's hill, commits *sati* there, and is taken in a celestial car by Indra along with her husband, Kovalan.*

Manimekalai itself begins when Manimekalai is thirteen years old, and is the most beautiful maiden in the country, and already the object of the affections of the Chola Crown Prince, Udayakumara. The subject matter of the whole epic is the sublime resistance Manimekalai offered

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* For the story of the *Silappadikaram*, see my *Kovalan and Kannaki*.

to Udayakumara's attempt to seduce her, in spite of an inward attraction on her own part towards him, her persistence in this resolve to be pure, despite all persuasions by her grand-mother and all other pressure put on her, and her success in finally achieving the maturity of mind required to receive the teachings of Aravana Adigal and take to a true Buddhist nun's life.

In making a woman born in the dancing-girl caste a model of chastity and purity, like this, the Tamil author has finely shown the democratic trend of the Dravidian mind. Unlike the Aryan Damayanti, Savitri and Sita, who were all princesses, or Arundhati, who was the wife of a leading sage, Manimekalai was but the daughter of a dancing girl. Neither Ambapali in Buddhist literature nor Magdalen in Christian literature can compare with this pure virgin.

The epic opens with the celebration of the Indra festival closely following the tragic end of Kovalan and Kannaki. Manimekalai's mother, Madhavi, had been plunged in grief at the tragic news and had, along with Manimekalai, entered a Buddhist convent and both had become nuns, being accepted into the order by the venerable sage Aravana Adigal. Manimekalai sheds tears on the flowers she is weaving into a garland for the evening worship. Madhavi asks her to fetch fresh flowers, as the tears had made the garland unfit for being offered in worship. Manimekalai and Sutamati set out for Uvavanam to gather

fresh flowers. Udayakumara, who is infatuated with her, rushes to the garden in search of her. Sutamati expostulates with him, but to little effect. Manimekalai is spirited away to the island of Manipallavam, 150 miles to the south, by the goddess Manimekalai, her guardian deity. She learns there about her past birth, from a Buddha-seat. She also gets a miraculous almsbowl, formerly belonging to Aputra, from a lotus pool there. She returns to Kaveripattinam with the almsbowl, and relieves the hunger and suffering of the famished inhabitants, including one Kayasandikai who was suffering from a hithero insatiable hunger known as "elephant hunger," the result of a sage's curse. She also makes the Chola king, Mavankilli, pull down the Central Jail and convert it into an almshouse, where she feeds one and all from her miraculous bowl. Udayakumara follows her there also, in his mad infatuation. She takes on the form of Kayasandikai, in order to escape from his attentions. He still follows her, and tries to visit her at night. Kayasandikai's husband, Kanchana, sees this, takes him to be making love to his own wife, Kayasandikai, and cuts him down with a sword. Manimekalai is ordered to be taken into custody by the King, Mavankilli, a very just man, simply for protecting her from the fury of the mob which loved the prince and held her responsible for his death. The Queen, Siritti, takes Manimekalai, into the palace on the ostensible plea of consideration for her but really for wreaking her vengeance on her for bringing about

her son's death. All the schemes of the Queen fail, and she repents. Manimekalai leaves for Savakanadu (Sumatra) to meet Aputra, who had been born as Punyaraja there, and tell him about his previous birth and her possession of the almsbowl which had been his then. She tells Punyaraja about his previous birth and takes him to Manipallavam. Both are shown the bones of Aputra by the goddess Manimekalai. Punyaraja constructs a sepulchre over them. Manimekalai dissuades Punyaraja from becoming a monk, and sends him back to Savakanadu. Then she goes to Vanji, as Kaveripattinam has been destroyed owing to the failure to observe the Indra festival, visits the temple of Kannaki, and receives information and advice from Kannaki. As directed by her, she takes the form of an old hermit and learns the tenets of the *Vaidikavadins*, *Brahmavadins*, *Vaishnavavadins*, *Saivavadins*, *Vedavadins*, and *Mimamsakas*, and of the *Ajivakas*, *Vaiseshikas*, *Jains* and *Bhutavadins*. Not satisfied with their teachings, she goes in search of Aravana Adigal to learn *Buddha Dharma* from him, hears from Kovalan's father, whom she meets in Vanji, that the sage has left for Kanchi, which was in the grip of a terrible famine, along with Madhavi and Sutamati, flies there, and relieves the famine there with her miraculous bowl. She then sees Aravana Adigal, and is taught by him the Buddhist logic and philosophy, and dedicates herself to a life of renunciation, becoming a true Buddhist nun engaged in following the noble eight-fold path.

The Manimekalai is a *mahakavyam* (epic) like the *Silappadikaram*, and is, therefore, the life-history of a heroine, subserving *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha*, the four *Purusharthas*, known in Tamil as *Aram*, *Porul*, *Inbam* and *Veedu*. But, really, the *Manimekalai* and *Silappadikaram* together form only one epic. In the *Silappadikaram* itself, it is stated that Sattan, the author of the *Manimekalai*, took up the brief tale of the hunters to Senguttuvan and explained it in detail. In the *Manimekalai* too, it is stated that Sattan read the thirty poems comprising the *Manimekalai* to Ilango Adigal, the author of the *Silappadikaram*, who listened to them in admiration, and that Sattan requested Ilango Adigal to write the *Silappadikaram*, as he was a prince of the blood and thus eminently fitted to write about the three Tamil Royal Families figuring in the story.

The author of the *Manimekalai* was the great poet Sattan, of the Sangham academy, who was a grain merchant by profession. We know very little about his life except that he was a great friend of Ilango Adigal, Kapilar and Paranar, and that he was a severe literary critic. He used to pierce his head with a steel style every time he detected a mistake in the manuscripts he read, so much so that his head festered with such sores, and he was known popularly, therefore, as "Sattan of the Suppurating Head"! Unlike many modern critics, Sattan applied an even severer standard to himself than to others. Though he was a member of the Sangham academy,

he did not even submit his *Manimekalai* to the Sangham for acceptance, evidently out of a feeling that it was not worthy of a place beside the great *Kural*, from which he has quoted with pride in the *Manimekalai* as the work of the bard of Truth. But Sattan was mistaken. The touching story of Manimekalai, the model of chastity, truth and purity, is worthy of a place by the side of the immortal *Kural*.

Any one reading these two great epics can see that the Tamil writers of those days had a thorough mastery of not only exquisite and chaste Tamil but also of Sanskrit as well, and were as perfectly at home with Aryan culture as with Dravidian culture. The words of St. Appar, "I have seen the beauty of Aryan culture, and I have seen the beauty of Tamilian culture," come forcibly to our minds when we read of the various sects and philosophies of India so graphically described in *Manimekalai*; of the legends of Tamil Kings like Manunitikandacholan, Nedumjeliyan, Kantama, Todittod Sembiyan, Kakandan and Karikala side by side with those of Aryan heroes like Parasurama, Rama, Krishna and Udayana; and of Vedic Brahmans and sages, side by side with Buddhist, Jain and Tamil saints. The Chola Kings claimed to belong to the solar dynasty, and the Pandyas and Cheras to the lunar dynasty. The Cholas traced their descent from Sibi, the great apostle of unselfishness who ruled in North India; the Pandyas claimed descent from the Pandavas; and the Cheras from Yadu. Thus, the Tamilians were,

practically, only "Southern Aryans," and they called one another, as they do even today, "Ayya," or "Arya" in its Tamil form. The epic itself begins with the 28 days' festival to Indra, the great Vedic deity. The unity of India is ever kept in view. In the Prologue, the goddess Champapati, the guardian deity of Jambudvipa, does penance at Trichinopoly, in the far south, to counteract the evils wrought by *Rakshasas*. She welcomes the Kaveri as another daughter, like the Ganga. Kaveri salutes her under the instructions of Agastya, the Aryan sage who had adopted the Podiyil Hills in South India as his home and had become Dravidian and had systematised Dravidian culture and made it rival the Aryan culture of the North. The unit for comparison in this epic is always Jambudvipa or India. The chamberlain of Savakanadu tells his King, Punyaraja, about Manimekalai, "In the whole of Jambudvipa, there is no one to match her in beauty, piety and charity." Kaveripumpattinam is described as the granary and centre of charity of Jambudvipa. It is significant that the emperor Asoka also, in his edicts, takes the unit for comparison as Jambudvipa, like the poets Sattan and Ilango Adigal.

The culture depicted in these glorious epics is predominantly Tamil, but, in part, also Pan-Indian and cosmopolitan. The garden house of Mavankilli, the Chola King, was built by Tamil architects aided by Maharatta sculptors, Avanti blacksmiths, Yavana carpenters and Magadhan

jewellers. There were no less than eighteen different languages spoken by the famine-stricken multitudes which flocked to Manimekalai for food at Kançhi. The famine-stricken multitudes of Bengal, in 1942, could not have been more cosmopolitan.

The age of the *Manimekalai* must be the same as that of the *Silappadikaram*, since both the epics are intrinsically connected and are expressly stated, even in themselves, to have been composed by Ilango Adigal the brother of Senguttuvan Chera, and his friend Sattan both of whom were, of course, contemporaries. Senguttuvan Chera was a contemporary of Gajabahu of Ceylon, and ruled in the second century A. D. So, in my opinion as in the opinion of many others, both these epics were composed about the second century A. D., shortly after the *Kural* but before the end of the great Sangham Age. The quotation of verse 55 of the *Kural* in the *Manimekalai* proves this epic to be later than the *Kural*. The fact that the author of the *Manimekalai*, Sattan, was a member of the Sangham academy shows it to have been composed before the end of the Sangham Age, or before the third century A. D. The logic expounded in the book by Aravana Adigal to Manimekalai shows a transition from Akshapada to Dignaga. The Buddhist philosophy expounded in it seems to follow the Sarvastivadin or the Sautrantika school, and seems to deny only the existence of individual souls, and not of the Universal Soul also. All these circumstances, as

well as the fact that Kanchi was ruled, in the days of the epic, by the younger brother of the Chola King, and not by the Pallavas, rule out any date later than the third century A. D, for *Manimekalai*. The language, the percentage of Sanskrit words, the mythical allusions (for example ascribing the *avatara* of Rama to a curse on Vishnu by the sages, and putting the site of the *Sethubandanam*, or Rama's Bridge, at Kanyakumari, instead of at Dhanushkodi or Darbhasayanam, which theories would never have been advanced after the *Valmiki Ramayana* had come into vogue in the south, which could not have been later than the fourth century A. D.), and the absence of all reference to *Uttara Mimamsa* and *Yoga* schools of philosophy, confirm the above conclusion. So too, the reference by Tivatilakai to the Buddha's star, *Visaka*, as the *fourteenth* asterism, reckoning from *Krittikai* and not from *Aswani*, as we have been doing ever since the days of Varahamihira who lived in the sixth century A. D. More detailed discussion will be out of place in a popular and brief book like this.

As may be expected from the fusion of two such wonderful cultures, we get many striking and original ideas. The kings are unselfish, and work for the welfare of their subjects. *Loka-sangraha*, or the welfare of the world, is their ideal, as in the *Gita*. The great enemies of agricultural countries, drought and flood, are tackled, and *permanent* remedies are sought, and not merely *temporary* ones. The sublime ideal of

co-operation between the gods and men is kept steadily in view. In great crises, an unselfish sage is consulted by the King, and not ministers with axes of their own to grind. Indra gives rain, and the deity of the market-place to punish malefactors, in return for the sacrifice represented by the annual festival. When it stops, the deity of the market place ceases to function, and the town itself is destroyed by the sea, as a punishment for the King who concentrates on his private and personal grief and forgets the great national festival.

Sutamati and the goddess Manimekalai tell Udayakumara that kings should not do anything unrighteous lest the rains should stop, and that they should regard the safety and honour of their meanest subjects as they would their own. This is more in consonance with commonsense than the Aryan ideal that the King should regard the joys and sorrows of his subjects as his, and disregard his own, too high an ideal to be followed. Janamitra and Manimekalai tell Punyaraja that his duty lies in ruling and protecting his subjects and not in abdicating and becoming a monk, the very same advice given, centuries later, by Ramdas to Shivaji.

At the annual festival, the streets and houses and temples are cleaned and decorated, and there is much merriment and dancing, but there are also sermons by preachers of various sects, and all men are adjured to mix together like brethren, even as the gods mix with men on festive days.

All religious teachers were honoured and allowed to preach. Such was the tolerance, and such the recognition that all religions were facets of the Truth, that Aravana Adigal, Kannaki and the goddess Manimekalai all impress on Manimekalai the imperative need to know the tenets of the other sects before being taught *Buddha Dharma.* There cannot be a better way of putting a study of comparative religion into active practice.

Famine, Pestilence and War, the great enemies of the starving millions of India, have been sized up and described accurately. The heralds proclaiming the Indra festival cry out: "May peace and plenty reign! Death to Hunger and Disease!" The goddess Tivatilakai tells Manimekalai, "Un-appeased hunger is a great curse, the greatest curse of humanity. It will destroy good birth, kill nobility, take away all love for learning, make people shameless, destroy beauty, and make self-respecting men beg." The elephant hunger of Kayasandikai and the vivid description of how "the stream of food went down her capacious throat into her expanding belly", and how it looked as if her hunger would never be satisfied, "like a stream getting lost in a desert", will be appreciated full only by one who has watched the members of these starving masses eat ravenously when given wholesome, nourishing and palatable food, after years of want and yearning.

But this alms-bowl reminds us of Andrew Carnegie's "Gifts according to Contributions."

It becomes inexhaustible only when some alms are put into it at first by a worthy soul, and does not, like the *Akshayapatra* of the *Mahabharata*, give endlessly even without putting anything into it. The commonsense of the Tamils saved them from too much romance, and kept them fairly realistic. How many of us, in these post-war days of rationing and food scarcity, long for the alms-bowl of Aputra! How many of us too wish that, at least in 2130 A. D., as predicted in this book, there will be a re-incarnation of the Buddha, as Maitreya, and that every one in the world will be impelled to practise the doctrine of mercy, and rains will never fail, and the earth will yield plentifully, living beings will not experience evil, the wind will blow in the right direction, prosperity will attend all the directions of the compass, the sea will give good things in plenty, cows will give pailfuls of milk, birds will not have to go in search of prey, beasts and men will give up their natural enmity, demons will cease to molest men, and human beings with defective limbs and mind will not be born?

The same commonsense is seen in the advice to young and beautiful women not to go unescorted, in advising people not to go near cows which have just calved, in describing the antagonism of the Brahmans towards Aputra when he attacked the Vedas and Vedic sacrifices and their successful boycott of him, and in the goddess's telling Manimekalai that no religious leader of her days would teach a woman, and that the only way to

learn the secrets of each sect was by changing her sex by a *mantra!*. So too, the other two boons, given to Manimekalai, are dictated by commonsense. The boon enabling her to fly through the air was based on the, sound principle, "Slow travel wastes time," though it was also essential in those days of impassable mountains and rivers and execrable communications. The "landing grounds" at Vanji, Kanchi, etc, for those who fly, sound eerily modern. The *mantra* to appease hunger was badly needed in those times when there were vast tracts without villages or habitations, and there were also no concentrated foodstuffs, let alone vitamin capsules. It has been truly remarked in this epic, "Lack of proper food at proper times is one of the greatest hindrances to concentration and studies." All modern libraries, therefore, provide for teas and lunches!

The passions of Lust and Anger are depicted with great insight. Of the five deadly sins, murder, theft, drink and lying are held to be far more easy to avoid than lust. Even a semi-divine being, like a *vidyadhara*, is swayed by it as when he carries away Sutamati. Prince Udayakumara is moved by lust towards Manimekalai as previous Chola princes towards Marudi and Visakai. A merchant prince is embracing a dancing-girl in foolish bliss at the Indra festival. Another, Saduvan, deserts his faithful wife, Adirai, for a dancing girl. Most horrible of all is the story of the artisan's wife who turned a public woman

and had relations with her own son. Manimekalai tells Udayakumara, showing him an old woman : "Great prince, this lady must have been more beautiful than I am now. And, yet, see her now! Her hair is grey, her skin is shrivelled, her colour has faded, her looks are jaded. Such is the fate of the body in every case. So, leave off all desire for the body, and take to higher things." The artisan's wife falls into a well and commits suicide, while her Oedipus son jumps down from the terrace and puts an end to himself. The rake who is sent by the Queen, Udayakumara's mother, to outrage Manimekalai has a remarkable experience. On lasciviously entering her room, one night, to debauch her, he finds a gigantic and ferocious man, jet black in colour, with red rolling eyes, and with protruding teeth, like the tusks of a wild boar, instead of the charming maiden he had expected to see, and runs away like one mad, and flees from the Chola country itself in order to escape from facing such dangers again!

The description of love, by Manimekalai, in Uvavanam, how it overwhelms one with the irresistible force of its attraction, and has little to do with respect by the loved one, or even return of the love by him, is graphic.

The ideal of chastity is very high; indeed it is so high that Marudi, who was a chaste wife by all human standards, considered herself, rightly, as having some element of lust in her because she had evoked lustful thoughts in the prince! Adirai is as great a model of chastity as Kannaki

herself. Marriages are held to be made in heaven, and a husband and wife are held to have been husband and wife in all previous births.

A dancing girl is described as a bee going from flower to flower, leaving a flower without a second thought as soon as its honey is exhausted. Her life is shown as involving the taking of liquor, the uttering of lies, the indulgence in promiscuous love, and pre-occupation with filthy thoughts.

Anger is described also very vividly. The volcanic and all-consuming anger of the goddesses is seen in Vindhyavasini's catching up Kayasandikai and destroying her when she flew over her temple against the unwritten flying laws of the immortals, and in the goddess Manimekalai's destroying the great city of Kaveripumpattinam when the King failed to celebrate the annual Indra festival. The anger of the queen against Manimekalai, who was indirectly responsible for the death of her son, Udayakumara, is more cunning and subtle. On the advice of that demon of an adviser, Vasantavvai, she tells the King that Manimekalai does not deserve to be in prison, and should be kept in her own room, and then tries to get her outraged or killed. The attempt to outrage her, in revenge for her refusing to be outraged by Udayakumara and thus making him grow desperate and come by his death, shows Sattan's profound psychological insight. Rahula's anger at a stranger's seeing him fall at his wife's feet, and his insane rage at the cook's delaying

the breakfast, and spilling it in his nervousness; Vrischika's anger at his twelve-yearly roseapple diet being spoilt by Kayasandikai, by unwittingly treading on it; and Kanchana's anger at his supposed wife's ignoring him and talking intimately to Udayakumara, are further examples of such insight. A cow's goring Kausika in anger when he went there when it had just calved, and another cow's goring the sacrificial priest to death, when he chased her in order to capture her and sacrifice her, ring true, and show that animal psychology too was not neglected. With all his admiration for non-violence, the poet did not forget that non-violence often generated a cowardly fear at the sight of blood as the one entertained by the Jains at the sight of Kausika's bleeding injuries inflicted by the cow. It is curious that, in those times, the cows of Tamil Nadu, like the men, were more warlike than their descendants living now!

The description of *Sudukattukottam*, with the five different methods of disposal of the dead, is graphic and gripping. The attack on the suggestion to exchange, with Death, one life for another, as carrying even beyond the grave the inequalities and iniquities of life, is original, democratic, and exhilarating.

Unexpected and refreshing turns of thought are a characteristic of this epic. Indra revenges himself on Aputra, for refusing his boon, by sending down timely rains and causing such bountiful crops that no one in the whole country needed

food from Aputra's bowl, and Aputra got dejected and migrated from the country in disgust and finally committed suicide at not being able to give charity! Manimekalai was kept in prison by the King in order to protect her from the fury of an unreasoning mob grieving for the death of Prince Udayakumara because of the refusal of this dancing girl to yield herself to him. This appearance of "Protective Custody" at such an early age may cause some surprise to those unacquainted with the advance of Hindu Law and Justice in those days. The King's statement, when he heard the circumstances of his son's death, that his only regret was that he did not have his son executed under his own orders, and the story of how a predecessor of his, Kakandan, had both his sons executed, one after the other, for attempting to outrage chaste women, show the stern and impartial justice of "the sons of the sun"* who kept the Bell of Justice ready for all aggrieved persons to pull, and were ready to sentence a Crown Prince for injury done to a calf by rash driving.

Saduvan's telling the cannibals of the Nicobar islands of the evils of meat, wine and women is clever. His proof of survival of personality after death, and of the spirit's going to another world, is classic. He says that a man cries out at the least pain inflicted on him, when alive, and that he does not cry out even when his body is burnt

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* The Chola Kings.

after his death, and that this shows that the man has left the body and gone to another world! His prescribing for the cannibals a standard of virtue commensurate with their development and within their reach, is also remarkable. He won the affection of these ferocious cannibals as effectively as the Christian missionaries did in the South sea islands in later days. The Tamils were great colonisers and civilizers, and the prominent place the East India islands assume in this epic speaks for itself. It is not in vain that their great poetess, Avvai, has said, " Seek wealth even by crossing the stormy sea."

Manimekalai's exposition to the queen, of the love of the body and the love of the soul is cogent, clear and convincing. Her going to the Central Jail to feed the prisoners, and her asking of the King, as a boon, the abolition of the Central Jail, and the building of almshouses and schools in its place, is a precursor of Jail Reform and of the Discharged Prisoners' Society. Udayakumara's oath not to move from the temple till the goddess reveals the whereabouts of Manimekalai is broken by the figure in the painting on the wall exposing the futility of suicide in the cause of unrighteousness. Chitrapati's appeal to Udayakumara to seize Manimekalai and force her to conform to the caste custom of the dancing girls is strangely disturbing in its implications. There are even now defenders of the Devadasi system, and their arguments are not more worthy of consideration than Chitrapati's. The drunkard's ex-

hortation to the thin man to drink toddy and become plump and handsome reminds one of the recommendations of similar drunkards in western countries to drink "stout" and become stout!

The ideal of penance and asceticism is very high. Father, mother, brother, sister, husband, wife, child and grand-child are all to be left behind by an ascetic, and his life dedicated solely to the welfare of the world.

The epic abounds in striking metaphors and similes. On hearing that Manimekalai had become a nun, Senguttuvan Chera exclaims, "Oh, what a priceless pearl has been thrown into the salty sea!" When the sun sets over Uvavanam and the golden glory is withdrawn, the garden is compared to a young, beautiful and cheerful woman suddenly losing her husband and becoming desolate. Then the moon rises, and is compared to a silver jar pouring out an endless stream of milk in the shape of moonlight. The channels with clear water running pure are compared to the minds of the great ones.

The parts of the book relating to the various systems of philosophy are of absorbing interest to philosophers, historians and antiquarians. The theory of knowledge and exposition of logic must interest teachers and psychologists. The search for knowledge and the pursuit of truth are unmistakable, even though one may smile at the categorical statement of the Ajivaka teacher that an atom cannot be split, or that white is the

highest colour, and black the lowest, and that a black man must become white before qualifying for salvation! Manimekalai's exquisite criticism, of the atheist's refusal to accept anything not vouched for directly by the senses, by pointing out that no human being knows who his parents are by direct cognition by the senses and that it is, therefore, foolish to go by such a theory, is refreshingly direct and convincing. The example given of an obviously self-contradictory statement namely, a man describing his mother as a barren woman, is also striking and amusing.

No doubt, the many miracles, and the almost wearisome stories of re-births, and the repeated insistence on *Karma*, and the long sermons on morality, may not find approval among modern readers, but are only to be expected in such ancient "morality" epics intended to foster morality and to show the way to salvation. I may add that even some great modern thinkers have declared that *Karma* is not a theory but a fact, thus showing that the Manimekalai school of thought is still going strong, at least in India, and is a fact to be reckoned with, whether modern readers like it or not.

The beauties of this epic are many, and a summary of it, like this, is very inadequate to enable the reader to appreciate its greatness. Still, following the principle of our ancestors, who took a pot of Ganges water to those who could not go to the holy river, I too offer this brief summary

to those who are unable to go to the great epic and enjoy it.

In conclusion, I trust that this book will make Tamils take a genuine pride in their own past, and show it in the only legitimate way possible, namely by enriching their mother-tongue with modern *Silappadikarams* and *Manimekalais*; and will also make them shed their fear that Sanskrit and Hindi will ever succeed in depriving Tamil of its pride of place in *Tamilnadu*, any more than the *Ganga* and *Yamuna* can replace the waters of the *Kaveri* for the irrigation of the southern fields. I trust, too, that this book will help people outside *Tamilnadu* to understand the Tamils and their culture better. A new world has come into being before our very eyes, with a new, rejuvenated independent India and a new and resurgent *Tamilnadu*, with Bharati as its standard-bearer. I offer this humble garland of mine at the feet of *Tamil Thai*, *Bharata Mata* and *Loka Pitamahi*.

Vellore,
Deepavali.
Kaliyuga 5049.

A. S. P. Ayyar.

MANIMEKALAI

CHAPTER 1

The Indra Festival Instituted

The goddess Champapati, the guardian deity of Jambudvipa[1] remained seated at Jambukesvaram,[2] in deep meditation, in order to counteract the evils wrought by *Rakshasas*[3] of evil deeds and to help the Chola King, Kavera, in his severe penance, in a grove near the sea-shore, for getting a river like the *Ganga*[4] for the south country. Kavera had grown old and had abdicated in favour

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1. India. Champapati itself means 'Jambu-pati', or 'Lady of Ind.'

2. Near Trichinopoly. Trichinopoly, or *Trissirapalli*, means 'the city of the three-headed demon', depicted even in Indus valley seals. This demon was eventually killed by Kali, the Mother Goddess.

3. Demons, who wander at nights and eat up human beings, and obstruct sacrifices and good deeds.

4. The Ganges.

of his son, Kantama, and taken to this arduous *tapas*.[1] Kantama, too, desired, equally eagerly, a perennial source of water for making his line and land prosper. But he adopted another line. He went to the sage Agastya, the patron saint of *Tamil Nadu* and the lover of everything Tamil, who was then doing penance in Brahmagiri hills in Coorg, the land of the thunderbolt, and said to him:— "Great sage, you have given to *Tamil Nadu* its unique alphabet and grammar.[2] You must give it also its unique river and crop."[3]

The sage, thus implored, upset his water-pot, containing the fruits of untold years of penance. But, the water, thus released, flowed into a hole in the hill, and got apparently lost.

"Alas!" said Kantama, "The precious water is lost."

"Oh, no. Nothing good is ever lost!" said the sage. "Look two furlongs away in the forest to the east, and you will see the sacred river emerging from the ground."[4]

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1. Penance.

2. Agastya wrote the first Tamil grammar, the *Agastiyam*. His pupil, Tolkappiyar, wrote the *Tolkappiyam*, the standard Tamil grammar.

3. Rice. The word really comes from the Tamil *Arisi*, and not from Sanskrit, *Vrihi*, as contended by some scholars.

4. As a matter of fact, the Kaveri takes its rise in a mysterious pool, at *Talakkaveri* and runs for two furlongs underground before emerging again into the open.

Kantama searched, and, sure enough, there was the river emerging mysteriously from the ground, at a spot two furlongs away.

"Great sage," said he, "what is this mystery?"

"Like the Saraswati, among the *Triveni** in the north, this is the portion of this river flowing underground. The other two rivers will be visible. The main river we shall call the Kaveri, after your father, Kavera, who is doing severe penance for it. The other river will be the *Bhavani*, which will join the Kaveri further up, even as the Yamuna does the *Ganga*. Come, let us follow the Kaveri."

The two followed the Kaveri. As the river went past the spot where Champapati was seated in meditation, Agastya asked the Kaveri to salute the goddess. Kaveri did so. Champapati got up, and blessed her, and said to her, "Hail to thee, O Kaveri, you are as dear to me as the *Ganga*. Go further on, and, after a grand sporting leap, at Sivasamudram, meet your lord, the sea, near the spot where King Kavera, after whom you have been named, has been doing penance for getting you, in order to save his beloved land from famine. At the spot where you join your lord shall arise a peerless city which shall be called *Kaveripattinam*, after you. Your unfailing bounty of water shall outlast

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* A name given to the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati (which is underground and invisible) at *Prayag*, or Allahabad.

the dry summer, and shall make the Chola kingdom, ruled by sovereigns famed all over *Jambudvipa* for unswerving righteousness, free from famine by your annual freshes, the result of timely rains in the hills, the proper reward for virtue and sacrifice."

So, the Kaveri flowed on for years with regular freshes, bringing abundant crops and prosperity to the Chola country. Todittot Sembiyan,[1] a successor of Kantama, overcame his foes, destroyed the impregnable flying fortresses of the *Rakshasas*, and reigned with great glory. But, one year, the rains failed, and there were no freshes in the Kaveri, and famine came in the wake of the drought, and his beloved people suffered. The King hastily sent for his family *guru*,[2] Agastya, from the Podiyil hills,[3] and begged of him to suggest a remedy. "Revered sir," said he, "let it be a permanent remedy, a lasting solution, like the Tamil language itself." Agastya then asked him to see Indra, the god of rain, and make him promise to come with the gods and be present at an Indra festival to be held at his capital, Puhar or Kaverippumpattinam,[4] every year for 28 days,

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1. 'Sembiyan' means 'descendant of Sibi' the emperor who gave his flesh to a vulture to save a dove.

2. Spiritual preceptor.

3. The modern **Agastyakutam** hills between Tinnevelly and Travancore.

4. A town at the mouth of the Kaveri. The same as Kaveripattinam.

from the full moon in the month of *Chithirai*[1] to the full moon in the month of *Vaikasi*.[2] "If he agrees," said the sage, "there will be regular freshes in the Kaveri, and your kingdom will never have drought or flood, so long as the festival is duly celebrated, and the eternal truths preached thereat by sages of all denominations. If the festival is not celebrated, for whatever reason, the guardian deity in the public square and the deity of the market place, which punishes thieves and sinners, will leave the city, and Manimekalai, the deity of the sea, which brings the city its prosperity, will get angry and destroy the city by a tidal wave."

The king went and stood before Indra and made the request. Indra smiled, and said, "The words of the sage of the water-pot,[3] the great Agastya, cannot be gainsaid even by the gods. I agree." Thereafter, the Indra festival was an annual fixture in Kaverippumpattinam and the Chola country became far-famed for its regular rains and crops, and for the great river Kaveri, the gift of king Kantama and sage Agastya, going like a beautiful bride, to meet her lord, the sea, decked with its never-failing supply of water, resembling pearls and crystals.

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1. A Tamil month from 15th April to 15th May.

2. A Tamil month from 15th May to 15th June.

3. Agastya was, according to legend, born from a water-pot, and is, therefore, called Agastya Kumbhayoni.

CHAPTER 2

The Festival Comes Round

The annual Indra festival came round. As usual, the great drum was taken out from the temple of the Thunderbolt,[1] and placed on the royal elephant. Then the king's crier went on the elephant, round the streets, beating the drum and crying out: "May Ponnivalanad,[2] Poompuhar[3] and the king's vows ever prosper! May our land be blessed with three rains every month! Citizens, our king, ministers and councillors have resolved to celebrate the Indra festival, as usual. The thousand-eyed Indra will come to our city tomorrow with the four classes of *devas*[4] and eight classes of *devatas*.[5] So, have *purnakumbham* and gold *palikas*[6] and statues with lamps[7] ready everywhere in the streets. Remove the dust from the roads and streets, and spread new sand. Decorate the streets and buildings with plantain and arecanut trees heavy with fruits, and with ferns, creepers and sugarcane. Put strings of pearls from pillar to pillar. Hang up flags,

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1. The Thunderbolt is the weapon of Indra.

2. Chola Country.

3. Kaverippumpattinam.

4. Minor gods.

5. Still more minor gods.

6. Offerings of water, mango-leaves, and sprouting plants, to please the gods. *Purnakumbham* is consecrated water in a pot.

7. To light up the streets, and to drive away the demons, the denizens of darkness.

buntings and festoons over doorways and gateways. Tidy up the temples, from the Siva* temple downwards to those of the deities of the public square and bazaar. Let the men of God, versed in the scriptures, assemble in halls, *mantapams* and platforms, and explain them to the masses. As gods and men mingle freely, at this season, on the sand-dunes, at the bathing ghats, and in the islets and river gardens, those who are enemies should cast off their enmity and become friends, and celebrate this joyous festival in perfect camaraderie. May peace and plenty reign! Death to hunger and disease!"

The chief elephant was followed by other elephants, and by groups of cavalry-men with drawn swords, and by chariots and infantry. Crowds of citizens and urchins also followed, vociferously repeating the proclamation.

* Siva has been the favourite form of the Deity for the Tamils, from the days of the Indus Valley civilization, and *Saivasiddhanta* the Tamil philosophy *par excellence*.

CHAPTER 3

Madhavi's Refusal

The festival began, the next day, with its customary splendour. But Madhavi and Manimekalai had heard the tragic news of the killing of Kovalan at Madura, on an unjust charge of theft, and of Kannaki's death by *sati*. They became sad beyond endurance, gifted away all their properties to the poor, and entered a Buddhist convent. They did not, therefore, go to the assembly hall, and delight the citizens with their dancing and singing, as was their custom at the Indra festival.

Hearing the bitter complaints of the citizens regarding this omission, Madhavi's mother, Chitrapati, became indignant. She called Vasantamala, the dear friend of Madhavi, and said to her, "Go to Madhavi and Manimekalai, and tell them that, since they have not come as usual to the Indra festival, the citizens are very much disappointed. Tell Madhavi, from me, that it is not meet that they should leave off their caste custom, and take to the alien institution of nuns, and that they should, therefore, both come here immediately, and that she has no right to ruin Manimekalai's career. Somehow, you should bring them here."

Vasantamala went at once to the convent, and became filled with sadness on seeing Madhavi and Manimekalai in their ascetic robes. She told

them, "This garb of penance ill becomes you, who belong to the dancing girl caste. Why do you behave like family women? All people condemn you for this deviation from our caste custom. For shame, come back!"

On hearing this, Madhavi said to her, "You have said all this from your delusion and ignorance. We have heard about the unjust execution of my beloved. A true woman, on losing her beloved, will forthwith die of shock and grief. Or, at least, she will commit *sati* by entering the fire as if it were the cool water of a tank. If a woman is unable to do even this, she should certainly wear her body out in prayer and penance, in order that she may, in another birth, live happily with her beloved. Kannaki, the chaste wife of my beloved, found it impossible to bear the calamity that had overtaken her husband. With her hair all dishevelled, with tears flowing in torrents over her breasts, she plucked off her left breast and hurled it at the great city of Madura, in terrible anger, and burnt that city. Manimekalai, the god-daughter of that chaste one, is fit only for the life of an ascetic, and not for the life of a dancing-girl, full of sin. I came to this convent with her, in my extreme grief, and fell at the feet of the great sage, Aravana Adigal, and narrated to him the sad fate of my beloved. He said to me, 'Sorrow is the legacy of all who are born. Life is only a long-drawn-out agony. Its pleasures are fleeting, like the flight of birds. Its pains alone are enduring.

Ache of the birth, ache of the helpless days of infancy, ache of hot youth, ache of manhood's prime, ache of the chill grey years, ache of choking death, these fill our piteous time. So, strive not to be born again, and attain unending bliss. Attachments bring about re-birth and sorrow; detachment brings about cessation of birth and happiness.' He also expounded to me the *silas*, or Buddha's rules of conduct*, and impressed on me that leaving off my wicked life, as a dancing girl, and leading a life of purity, prayer and repentance was the only way to save myself. Hereafter, Manimekalai and I are Buddha's daughters, true *devadasis* dedicated to Buddhadeva, in other words, nuns dedicated to a life of purity, prayer and penance. Go and tell this to my mother and our companions."

Vasantamala, with a mind as disturbed as that of one who has seen priceless gems thrown into the salty sea, went and told Chitrapati all this.

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* These are:—not to kill any living thing, not to commit adultery, not to take things not given, not to break a word, not to take any intoxicating drug or drink, not to utter a lie, not to slander others, not to indulge in obscene or frivolous or vain talk, not to hoard money, food or clothes, not to follow shameful occupations, etc.,

CHAPTER 4

Manimekalai Goes To Uvavanam

Manimekalai went on shedding tears, all day long, for the sad fate of her father, Kovalan, and her step-mother, Kannaki. Those tears wetted the fragrant flower garland she had in her hand for worship. Madhavi saw this, wiped off her tears, consoled her with sweet words, and said to her, "Since your tears have fallen on the garland, it cannot be offered for the evening worship. Go to the garden, and bring other flowers."

Manimekalai was about to start for the flower garden. Then, her Brahman nun friend, Sutamati, said to her, "A beautiful young woman, like you, should not go alone to the flower garden late in the evening. Many evil things may happen. Hear what I suffered by going alone. I am the daughter of a celebrated Brahman, Kausika, of the famous city of Champa, in North India. One day, without thought or fear, I went to a flower garden there, and was gathering flowers. Then Maruthavega,[1] a *Vidyadhara*,[2] who was on his way to see the Indra festival here, entertained a sudden passion for me, swooped on me, and took me across the sky. He kept me for some time, and then brought and left me here. Girls come to grief like this if they go alone. So, I

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1. "Swift as the wind".

2. A Semi-divine being.

shall also accompany you. Ilavanthikai cholai* being the residence of the royal family, we should not go there. Uyyanavanam* can only be entered by the gods, and not by mere human beings like us. Demons guard the flowers there, and even bees dare not approach that garden. Kaverivanam* and Sampadivanam* are guarded by gods. So, we should not go there. There is, however, a garden called Uvavanam where, by the grace of the all-merciful and all-loving god, there are many trees with beautiful flowers. That garden is the abode of many ascetics of rigid vows. So there is no possibility of our coming to any evil by going there. In the middle of that garden, there is a beautiful, sound-proof crystal pavilion. People in there can only be seen, and not heard. Inside it there is a lotus pedestal of the Buddha, set with rubies. Buds put on it in worship open of themselves. Full-blown flowers offered on it remain fresh and unfading. No bees or beetles will dare to touch flowers put on it. That pedestal has many miraculous virtues. It was built by the great architect Maya. Its splendour cannot be described. It can be realised only by seeing it. If we go to that garden, we can bring many fragrant flowers." So saying, she started for that garden with Manimekalai.

The two went along the streets where the festival was still in full swing. They heard, on the way, a drunkard telling an emaciated man, who had taken a vow to fast, "My good man, if

* Names of various gardens in the city.

you drink toddy, your thin body will become plump and handsome, and a joy to look at. Your mind, now suffering in the withered body, will also cast off its sadness and pain, and attain untold joy. So, take a drink of toddy." There were crowds of people in the streets. There were many gazing at the beautiful and life-like paintings on the walls of the houses. On seeing Manimekalai, all of them crowded round her, and said to one another: "Madhavi, who has consigned this peerless beauty to a life of asceticism, is, indeed, a wretch. We can't imagine the grief the swans of the flower garden will suffer on seeing the gait of this queen among women outrivalling theirs." Manimekalai and Sutamati heard all this, and went into the Uvavanam.

CHAPTER 5

Udayakumara's Infatuation

On entering the garden, they saw innumerable trees and flowers of all kinds, and channels with clear water, running pure, like the minds of the great ones. The creepers, shrubs, ferns and palms were also as beautiful as they were numerous. When they were watching all this beauty, and wandering about the garden in joy, they heard a big hubbub. The king's crown elephant, Kalavegam,* had got out of control, and run amok in the town, causing panic among the people. On hearing the hubbub, the crown Prince, Udayakumara, went after it with a group of trained mahouts, and brought it under control, just outside the Uvavanam. When returning to the palace, in his chariot, through Dancing Girl Avenue, he saw a merchant prince, Ettikumara, holding his *Vina* in one hand, and with his other arm round a beautiful dancing girl, standing astounded like a statue. On questioning him, he learnt that he was flabbergasted at seeing Manimekalai, the greatest beauty of the day, in a nun's robes, go past into the Uvavanam with Sutamati, and on remembering the woes of Kovalan and Kannaki.

Udayakumara was secretly enamoured of Manimekalai. "I shall go at once and bring her," he said to Ettikumara, and turned his chariot back, and went into the Uvavanam. The noise

* "Fleet as time".

of his chariot was heard by Manimekalai. She became frightened. She called Sutamati and said to her, "Don't you hear the sound of a chariot? It seems to me to be the sound of Udayakumara's fast chariot. I have heard Chitrapati tell Madhavi that he is greatly enamoured of me. Suggest some device by which I can escape from him." Sutamati asked her to get inside the crystal pavilion and bolt the door. She herself stood a little distance away, and watched.

Udayakumara, on going into the garden, saw Sutamati standing alone. He asked her, "Why are you standing alone in this lonely place? I heard that you came here with Manimekalai. Where is she? Has she recovered her smiles? It is a good thing that she has left that gloomy convent and come to this pleasure garden." Sutamati was at first afraid to reply to the prince. But, finally, she mustered up courage, and said to him, "Oh descendant of the great Karikala, who, in early childhood, decided the disputes of two men, disguised as an old man, and found out the truth from their own words, you need not be taught your royal duty by a girl like me. Still, I shall say this much. Listen. The body is the result of our previous *Karma.** It is the seat of evil. Remove the garments, ornaments, and outside veneer from any human being, and the smell of flesh will come. The savage in us is always there. The body is the abode of pain. The poisonous cobras of anger and hatred lurk in it. It contains

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* Actions.

within it present suffering, the helplessness to get out of it, and bitter, resultant, sorrow. Desire is the root of all evil. Desist, therefore, from your desire for Manimekalai."

But, Udayakumara was not listening. He had seen the fascinating form of Manimekalai within the crystal chamber, and was looking at her like one enchanted. He went round the crystal wall feeling for the door, but could not find it. "Tell me how to enter this pavilion," he asked Sutamati.

"I won't," said she. "She is destined for a life of virtue. Lust will not take possession of her. Go away in peace. She may even curse you, if you persist."

"Oh, stop this talk!" said the prince. "I shall somehow make her my own. She is only a dancing girl, having no claims to virtue or penance or high caste."

"You will never succeed in this," said she.

"Love will find out a way," he replied, "even as the *Vidyadhara's* love found out a way in your case. By the way, the *Vidyadhara* left you in a Jain convent here. How did you get out of it, and come here now, with Manimekalai, from a Buddhist convent?"

"My father, Kausika, went from place to place in search of me, and reached this town, and saw me in the Jain nunnery," said Sutamati. "His heart would not allow him to be separated

from me, his only child, whom he had brought up affectionately since the death of my mother when I was a babe. So, he began living here as a beggar, visiting me every day after his daily rounds. One day, he went near a cow which had just delivered a calf. Thinking that he was after its calf, the animal ran at him, gored him, and tore open his stomach. Pressing his entrails with his hand, he came to the Jain nunnery where I was, and prayed for admission and treatment there. The nuns, horrified at the sight of the blood and the entrails, refused to let him in, but allowed me to go away with him. A Buddhist monk called Sanghadharma took pity on us, and admitted us to a Buddhist monastery, and told us about the glory of the Buddha who conquered all desire and worked for the salvation of the entire humanity. My father died greatly consoled. I am spending my days since then in recounting the Buddha's deeds and words. Desist, oh prince, from your desire for Manimekalai."

"Never!" said Udayakumara, "I shall gain that darling of my heart through the good offices of the palace dancer, Chitrapati," and he returned to the palace in his chariot.

Manimekalai opened the door, and came out of the pavilion, casting wistful eyes on the departing chariot. "Oh Sutamati," said she, "I feel strangely drawn towards him. My heart runs after him, though this is the first time I see him. He has spoken of me as a woman of no virtue, and as not entitled to perform penance,

and as a person who can be bought for a price. Instead of being angry with him for that, why does my heart yearn for him? Is this the nature of what is cal·ed Love? If so, may that love be wiped out of my heart!"

The sun set, casting its last golden rays on the tall palace tower in the centre of the city. Soon, the shades of evening fell on the garden which changed its merry aspect into a sad one, like a young, beautiful and cheerful woman suddenly losing her husband and becoming desolate. But, soon, the moon appeared in the sky, like a silver jar, and flooded the garden with moonlight as if it was pouring out an endless stream of milk.

CHAPTER 6

The Goddess Manimekalai Steps In

The goddess Manimekalai, who had saved one of Kovalan's sea-faring ancestors, and whose name had, in consequence, been given to our heroine, descended to the garden and worshipped the Buddha as the Knowing One, the Pure One, the Exalted One, the conqueror of desire, and the destroyer of evil conduct. Then she saw Sutamati and Manimekalai, and went to them in the guise of a nun and asked them why they were standing perplexed there. They told her everything. She said that Udayakumara was madly infatuated with Manimekalai, that he had not used violence against Manimekalai there, because the garden was a grove where holy men were engaged in penance, but that he would use violence on her if she went out of the garden to the public highways of the town. She advised the two to spend the night in *Chakravalakottam*,[1] called also *Sudukattukottam*,[2] where many holy ones were performing penances of various kinds. "Life ends in death," said she, "whether the corpse is thereafter burnt or buried, or put in big mud pots, or eaten by wild beasts or birds. No mortal can escape death."

"What is the origin of this *Sudukattukottam*? What are the things found there? Is death really inevitable?" asked Sutamati.

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1. The temple of the horizon of life.
2. The temple of the burning ghat.

"*Sudukattukottam* is the burning ground of this great city. It came into existence along with the city itself. It adjoins this garden. It is enclosed by a wall on all sides. It has four gates. It has a temple dedicated to Kali, the Mother Goddess, and various tombs of varying sizes and designs bearing inscriptions giving the name, caste, status and manner of death of those whose monuments they happen to be. There are, besides, pillars dedicated to the various gods of the burning-ghat to whom various offerings are made. There are platforms of stone for the mourners, and rooms for the guards and mourners to shelter themselves from wind and rain. There are some triumphal arches erected when the corpses of the great ones rode there in state. There are also shady groves of characteristic trees of the cremation ground. The whole place is divided into sections for various forms of the disposal of the dead. A small space is set apart for burning the corpses ; another spot is set apart for corpses which are merely exposed for vultures and other beasts of prey to finish off; a third where the corpses are actually buried in graves dug in the earth ; another, where corpses are deposited in chambers made in the earth, their mouths being closed afterwards ; and lastly another part where corpses are buried in huge earthen pots. Up to midnight, people keep coming and going, engaged in one or other of these various ways of disposing of the dead, and there is unceasing noise in the locality created by the crowd of visitors, the tom-tom beaten for

the dead, the sounds of those that recite the merits of recluses that died, the cries of those that weep for the dead, the howling of the jackals, the screeching of the vultures, and the hooting of the owls. Different kinds of trees also are found grown close to each other. There are places with the *Vahai* trees, the favourite haunt of evil spirits; the *Vila*, the resort of birds eating the fat and flesh of the dead; the *Vanni*, the resort of the Kapalikas; and the *Ilandai*, to which resort mendicant ascetics making garlands of broken skulls. There are open, unshaded, unwooded places, the resort of *aghorapanthis* who even eat the flesh of corpses. The whole place is strewn with pots in which fire has been carried, pots in which articles for other funeral uses have been carried, torn garlands, broken water-pots, fried paddy and other articles of offerings to the dead. While death, without regard to age, standing, condition or kind of life, goes about killing in heaps in this fashion, to be disposed of in this field of death, is there anything more foolish that can be imagined than that there should be people who still place faith in rank and wealth and, losing themselves in lust, anger and greed, live their life without doing good?

"You ask me if death is inevitable for all. Hear this story. This fearsome place of death happened to be visited by a Brahman youth in the belief that it was a part of the city. He saw there an evil spirit in ecstatic dance, and taking fright at the apparition, ran to where his mother,

Gautami, was, got a raging fever, and died in a few days. Distracted with grief at the death of her only support, the mother cried out in despair: 'Who can it be that took away the life of our son who was the mainstay of myself and my aged husband, both of us blind and faint with age and infirmities?' Carrying her son's corpse, she went to the gate of the burning-ghat, invoked Champapati, the goddess of the town, and demanded of her how she happened to fail in her duty of protection of this youth, when she had made it her business to see that no harm befell anybody in the burning-ghat, places of assembly, the ground round the trees, the sequestered temples, and other places occasioning fear in people. She demanded to know if the goddess had lost her righteousness.

"The goddess Champapati appeared in response to this invocation and asked her what it was that made her so sorrow-stricken as to brave the dangers of a midnight visit to the burning-ghat. Learning from her of the death of her son, she told the disconsolate mother that no devil or evil spirit had taken her son's life and that his own previous *karma* was responsible for his death. Old Gautami offered to give up her life if the goddess would restore her son to life, as, thus restored, he would be a protection to his father. The goddess replied that, when one's life goes out of the body it follows the track of its own deeds, regardless of father, mother, wife or son. 'To restore a life that is gone is not a matter

possible of achievement by even the gods. Therefore, give up your useless sorrow for your dead son. If a dead man can be restored to life by giving another life in return, don't you think that many poor men can be made to give up their lives in exchange for the lives of the Kings and Queens and mighty ones of the earth, making the other world too as full of inequality and iniquity as this one? Don't you see in front of you here hundreds of monuments erected to Kings, Queens, Generals and other mighty ones, showing the futility of offering such exchange to Death?' Gautami said in reply, 'I have heard Vedic Brahmans say that gods can restore the dead to life. If you will not restore my son to life, I shall commit suicide in front of you'. The goddess Champapati said, 'No god can do that. I shall call all the gods and goddesses here to bear witness to that statement.' She then called all the gods and goddesses, from Brahma downwards, there. All of them assured Gautami that no one could offer his life in exchange for a dead one, and that the *karma* of each person brought about his or her death at the appointed time. Gautami then reconciled herself to her lot, had her son's corpse burnt, and returned home sadder and wiser. To illustrate to future generations the extraordinary power of the goddess Champapati, Maya, the divine architect, constructed a monument in *Sudukattukottam* with the great mountain, Meru, in the middle, with the seven mountains around it, the four great islands, the two thousand smaller islands, and other places of note, and the kinds

of beings said to live in them, as a memorial to the visit of the gods at the bidding of Champapati. Hence the name *Chakravalakottam*, or the temple of the horizon, called by the common folk *Sudukattukottam*, or temple of the cremation ground."

Manimekalai, who had listened to all this, remarked to herself, "Such is life on earth." Sutamati had fallen asleep. The goddess Manimekalai then charmed Manimekalai also to sleep, and carried her by air to Manipallavam, an island a hundred and fifty miles to the south, and returned to Puhar, leaving her there. Then, she went to Udayakumara, who was passing a restless night, dreaming of capturing Manimekalai by force the next morning, and told him, in a dream, "Oh Crown Prince! You intend to be King of this land one day. If a King deviates from *Dharma* ever so little, the rains will cease, and the land will become desolate. Besides, a King will cease to be regarded as a King if he does not regard the life and honour of all his subjects as his own. Is there anything more unrighteous than using force on a woman, aye even on one born in the dancing-girl caste, to satisfy your lust? So, cast away the wicked thoughts you have entertained towards Manimekalai who is now a nun and a daughter of Buddha!"

Returning from there to where Sutamati was sleeping, she told her, in a dream, that she was the goddess Manimekalai who had come to see

the Indra festival, and that she had carried Manimekalai away to Manipallavam in order to enable her to have a knowledge of the previous birth of herself and Sutamati, and also to get her faith in Buddhism reinforced, and that Manimekalai would return to Puhar on the seventh day from then. She asked Sutamati to tell Madhavi all this and to tell her also that Manimekalai would become a pure Buddhist nun, and to remind her of her telling her, in a dream, when she had just conceived Manimekalai, "You will become the mother of a child who will defeat the God of Passion completely, and take to a life of holy penance."

Sutamati woke up, trembling, and was much distressed at the separation from Manimekalai. She entered *Chakravalakottam* by one of its gates, and retired to a corner of that temple. A statue on a pillar in front of her told her that she had been Virai in her previous birth and that Madhavi and Manimekalai had been her elder and younger sisters, Tarai and Lakshmi, in that birth, all being the daughters of Ravivarma. It told her further that she had been the wife of Durjaya, who had the finest cavalry in the land, and that she had met her death by a newly-captured elephant when she had lost control over herself by drink and had gone in front of it and that Tarai also had committed suicide at this. It too assured her that Manimekalai would return to the city in seven days with a full knowledge of all their previous births.

Sutamati spent the rest of the night in fear and trembling. In the morning, she went to Madhavi and told her everything. Madhavi was plunged in sorrow like a serpent which had lost its crest jewel. Sutamati also remained dazed and incapable of action, like a corpse, because of her separation from Manimekalai.

CHAPTER 7

Manimekalai at Manipallavam

Manimekalai, meanwhile, woke up from sleep at Manipallavam. The whole place was as strange and unfamiliar to her as to a soul in a new birth. When she had hardly time to gather her wits together, the sun rose. In the sunlight, a part of her courage returned. She began to wonder whether this was a part of the garden which she had never seen before. She called out, "Oh, Sutamati, where are you? Surely, you have hidden yourself somewhere. You are causing me great fright. I do not know whether I see things as they are, or in a dream. My heart is quaking with fear. Answer me at once! The darkness of the night has left. My mother, will be in great anxiety. Oh, come on! Have you really left the place, having brought me here? Is this a thing brought about by that lady who appeared last night before us and who seemed to be an expert in magic? I hardly know what to do. I am in great fear, being alone. Do come quickly." Crying out like this, she ran about here and there to the deserted bathing-ghats on one side and to the lonely sand dunes on the other. All her search was in vain. Finding nobody, she began to weep aloud. She thought of her father and his tragic end, and cried out, "Oh, father, you went to another kingdom with your wife, and suffered cruel death from the

sword of unthinking and unfeeling authority. Am I too to die on this desert island?"

She wandered about till she came to a seat of the Buddha. The seat had been placed there by Indra, and had the miraculous power to let those who worshipped it know their previous life, as the Buddha himself had delivered a sermon on his past births sitting on it. This happened on the occasion when two neighbouring Naga chiefs, related to each other, fought each other for some trivial cause. As the war proved highly destructive, the Buddha appeared before them and pacified the combatants by preaching the sermon.

On seeing this miraculous seat, Manimekalai forgot herself in wonder. Her hands automatically folded over her head; from her eyes flowed tears of joy; she circumambulated the divine seat three times, and prostrated before it. To her wonder she began to recollect all that had taken place in her previous existence. She recounted to herself what had happened thus :–" Oh, reverend Brahma Dharma, I now understand clearly that all that you said on the banks of the river Kayankarai is coming true. In the eastern province of Gandhara[1] was the city Idavayam[2]. The king was Attipati.[3] You, Brahma Dharma, were his brother-in-law. You foretold him, while teaching him *Dharma*: 'In seven days from now, there will be an earthquake. As a result of this, this capital city of

1. Kandahar in modern Afghanistan.
2. Rishabhadwayam, or, "Two Bulls Town".
3. Hastipati.

yours and four hundred *yojanas*[1] of territory will get submerged. Therefore abandon this city and go away to another kingdom quickly.' The king announced this by beat of drum to all the citizens and asked them to vacate the city in time with him. As he was moving at the head of his people to Ujjaini, the capital of Avanti, he along with you camped on the banks of the river Kayankarai.[2] Then, there was the earth-quake, as you predicted, on the day and at the time indicated, and the royal city of Idavayam was destroyed. The king and his court, their respect for you increased by this incident, surrounded you in Ujjain and you were delivering a sermon. At that time I came with my husband Rahula to listen to the sermon. Seeing me, you said solemnly that my husband Rahula would die on the sixteenth day by a cobra whose very sight was death; that I would enter the funeral pyre with him; that I would then be born in the city of Puhar, and that a great misfortune would befall me; that the goddess Manimekalai would take me safely to an island in the sea to the south of Puhar. I asked you about the next birth of my husband, Rahula. You referred me to the goddess Manimekalai. Oh, why has she left me without telling me this?" She wept. The goddess came down from the clouds. Descending to the earth, she went right round the Buddha seat thrice, and offered it worship. Manimekalai made due obeisance to the goddess, and asked her, "By your

1. Here, it means "miles".
2. The Kshipra river, near Ujjain.

grace, I am now possessed of knowledge of my previous birth ; where is my husband Rahula reborn? Why did he fall a victim to the cobra?" The goddess replied: 'Oh, Lakshmi, (that was your name in the past birth), you were one day with your husband in a garden, having fallen out with him in a love quarrel. He fell at your feet to remove your displeasure. While in that position there appeared a Buddhist *Charana* by name Sadhu Sakkaran. He had gone to the neighbouring island of Ratnadwipa to set the Wheel of Law going, and was returning across the air. Being mid-day, he came down to the earth, as it was the hour for taking food. Seeing him, you were ashamed at your husband lying at your feet, and you offered your obeisance to him. Rahula was put out at your reverence for him, and demanded who he was, in a tone of anger. Trembling with fear at these irreverent words, you shut his mouth and told him that it was an error on his part not to have done due worship at the feet of the great one who had just descended from the air. Taking him with you, you again made profound obeisance to the sage, and offered to bring him food and drink, though both of you were not of his way of persuasion, and requested him to accept food from you. The *Sadhu* consented. The merit that you have thus acquired by feeding him will bring you a good reward soon, and will ultimately rid you of rebirth. That Rahula, your husband, is the Prince Udayakumara who came after you to the garden. This explains why he exhibited such strong affection for you and why you were also attracted

towards him. To take away that attachment, and to keep you on in the path of 'Buddha's daughter', I brought you over here and showed you this divine seat. I shall tell you something more. In your past birth, when you were the daughter of Ravivarma and Amudapati, King and Queen of Yasodharanagari, you had two sisters, Tarai and Virai, both of whom had married Durjaya, King of Kachapanagara in the kingdom of Anga. One day, Durjaya took both his queens for a picnic in the hills by the side of the Ganges. When returning, the party met, on the banks of the Ganges, the great Buddhist saint, Aravana Adigal. The King asked him where he was going, and was told that he was returning after worshipping the foot-prints of the Buddha in Padapankajamalai, or Gridhrakuta hills. Aravana Adigal added that the Buddha stood on the top of that hill and taught his *Dharma* to all living beings in order that they might free themselves from Sorrow, which pervaded life, and live in happiness, and that when he preached thus, in love, his foot-prints became imprinted permanently on the hill which thereafter became known as *Padapankajamalai* (the hill bearing the lotus-feet mark). He advised the king and his queens also to go and worship those feet. They did so. Because of the merit accrued thereby, Virai and Tarai were born as Sutamati and Madhavi. Manimekalai, now you have understood what you were in your past birth. You have, I daresay, already a vague notion of what *Buddha Dharma* is. You must hear the teachings of various sects

in our land before you understand it fully. It is the highest peak in a chain of high peaks, like *Kanchana Sringam*,[1] or *Deepa Sangham*[2] in the mighty Himalayas. The teachers of these sects will not tell you their truths because you are a woman, and a young woman too. But a knowledge of their teachings is essential for you, in order to understand *Buddha Dharma* in its true setting. So, I shall teach you a *mantra* by uttering which you can fly through the air, across mountains and rivers, with ease, and another by which you can change your form as you like, and a third by which you can get rid of hunger. You are meant in this life to become a holy Buddhist nun who would fully master the Buddha's teachings. You must first of all master the innermost truths of the other sects and creeds. They will not teach you the truths if you go as a woman. Hence the *mantra*[3] enabling you to change your form. You will have to go to distant lands to master the various truths, and slow travel wastes time. Hence the *mantra* enabling you to fly through the air. Lack of proper food at proper times is one of the greatest hindrances to concentration and studies. Hence the *mantra* to appease your hunger."

With this, the goddess flew away, and disappeared. Manimekalai walked about in the island for some time admiring the beauty of

1. Kanchanasringam, 'Golden Horn': Mt. Kinchinjunga.
2. Mt. Godwin, Austen. It means 'Cluster of lights'.
3. A sacred spell or incantation or prayer.

the sand dunes, flower gardens and tanks, and wondering at what had occurred to her. Then the goddess *Tivatilakai*[1] met her and ascertained from her who she was in her past birth and in this. She then told her:—"On the high peak of Samantakuta, in the adjoining island of Ratnadwipa there are the foot-prints of the Buddha. Having offered worship there, I came to this island long ago. Since then I have remained here keeping guard over this seat, under the orders of *Indra*.[2] My name is Tiva-Tilakai. People following the *Dharma* of the Buddha strictly and offering worship to this "Buddha-seat" will gain knowledge of their previous birth. Such people are few. You must be such a great one. In front of this seat there is a little pond full of cool water overgrown with lotuses. From that pond will appear a never-failing "alms-bowl" by name Amrita Surabhi.[3] The bowl belonged once to Aputra and appears every year on the full moon day in the month of Rishabha, in the fourteenth asterism,[4] the day in which the Buddha himself was born. That day and hour are on. That bowl will presently come into your hand. Food put into it by a pure one will be inexhaustible. You will learn all about it from Aravana Adigal, who lives in your own native city."

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1. "Dwipa-tilaka" or the crest-jewel of the island.

2. Sakka or Indra, is as favourite a figure in Buddhist legend as in Hindu and Jain.

3. "Endless Nectar".

4. Visaka Nakshatram. Now the 16th asterism. Then the reckoning was from Krittikai, and not from Aswani, as now.

Manimekalai on hearing this, made her obeisance to the Buddha-seat, and went along with Tiva-Tilakai, and, circumambulating the pond, stood in front of it. The bowl emerged from the water, and, turning round to the right, reached her hands. Manimekalai felt delighted beyond measure, and uttered the following chant in praise of the Buddha :—

'Hail, holy feet of the Hero who conquered Lust,
'Hail, holy feet of Him who shunned the evil path,
'Hail, holy feet of Him who set men in *Dharma's* path,
'Hail, holy feet of the Wise One who gave others too wisdom,
'Hail, holy feet of Him whose ears were deaf to evil words,
'Hail, holy feet of Him whose tongue never uttered a lie,
'Hail, holy feet of Him who visited hell itself to relieve suffering there,
'Hail, holy feet of Him Who rid the Nagas of their woes!'

Then she said in ecstasy :—

" In my former life, my husband died by a cobra. I ascended the funeral pyre with him, and, while burning, I thougt of the Buddhist monk, Sadhu Sakkara, to whom I had given a feast. As a result of that thought, this hunger-relieving bowl has come into my hands, I believe. Like a mother's breast which at the sight of the face of her hungry child begins yielding milk,

I wish to see this bowl in my hand provide a supply of inexhaustible food at the sight of those who are oppressed with hunger, and wander about in dripping rain or scorching sun in search of something to appease it."

Tivatilakai said to her :— "Unappeased Hunger is a great curse, the greatest enemy of humanity, like grinding poverty. It will destroy good birth, kill nobility, take away all love for learning, make people shameless, destroy beauty, and make self-respecting men beg. The sage Visvamitra once ate the flesh of a dog, in order to appease his hunger in a famine and shamed Indra, by offering a part of it to Him, * into sending down the rains. Food given to the hungry is true charity. Food given to the well-to-do is misplaced charity. Come, take the bowl, which has become yours by your hospitality to Sakkara, and go back to Kaveripattinam and other places, and feed the hungry."

Manimekalai made a profound obeisance to her, and, circumambulating the Buddha-seat again, uttered the *mantra* which gave her the power to fly, and flew through the air to Kaveripattinam. She met her mother and Sutamati, and told them of her previous birth to their great wonder. Taking them along with her, she went to see the holy sage Aravana Adigal, telling them, on the way, that the bowl in her hand was the inexhaustible food-supplying one which once

* Hindus offer a portion of the food to god, when saying grace, before eating it.

belonged to Aputra, and that the only way for them to live a good life on this earth was by resorting to Aravana Adigal for spiritual guidance and by following his directions.

Manimekalai, Madhavi and Sutamati met Aravana Adigal. He was a venerable old man. His hair was all gray, and his body was bent with age, but his voice did not show the least trace of trembling. Manimekalai went round him thrice, and prostrated herself before him. She then told him all that had happened to her ever since she went to the flower garden with Sutamati till that moment. She ended up by saying that the goddess Manimekalai had directed her to him to find out fuller details about the previous births of her mother and Sutamati, and to hear the story of Aputra and his magic alms-bowl which she had now secured.

Aravana Adigal smiled, and said:— "Yes, I shall tell you, my dear. Once I met Durjaya Raja and advised him to visit Padapankajamalai, or Gridhrakuta hill. Later on I met him in a grove by the Ganges. He was frantic with grief. I asked him for the cause. He told me that his beloved queen, Virai, had been trampled to death by a newly-captured elephant when she went rashly in front of it when she was dead drunk, after a grand dinner, and that her sister and fellow-queen, Tarai, had, on hearing of this catastrophe, thrown herself down from the terrace of the palace and been killed instantly. I consoled him by saying that the death of the queens was

the result of their previous *karma*, and that sorrowing for them was fruitless, and asked him to be brave and to discharge his normal duties, as King, instead of neglecting them and causing misery to all his subjects and incurring sin." Turning to Madhavi and Sutamati, the sage said, "You two have come to the world's stage again, like actors in new parts."

Turning to Manimekalai, he said, "My dear, *Dharma* is on the decline in this age, and *Adharma* is steadily on the increase. But believing that there is still a possibility of reviving *Dharma*, I have persisted in preaching it. That *Dharma*, people in this world do not know. But, within the circuit of this universe, the *Devas* understand it, and, at their request, Buddha Deva will come down again to this world from the *Tushita* Heaven in the year 1616,[1] as Maitreya.[2] Then everyone in this world will feel impelled to practise the doctrine of mercy. When the Buddha appears, the sun and the moon will shine without interruption, asterisms that mark the day will move in their orbits without stopping, rains will never fail, the earth will yield plentifully, living beings will not experience evil, the wind will blow in the right direction, prosperity will attend all directions of the compass, the sea will give good things

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1. Obviously, a mistake for 2616, or 2130 A. D. There is a widespread belief among Buddhists that the Buddha, as Maitreya, will re-incarnate in India then, to save a world weary of wars and conflicts. The year given is, of course, B. D. (Buddha's Nirvana era), and dates from 486 B. C.

2. "Maitreya" means "Lord of Mercy".

in plenty, cows will, of themselves, yield pailfuls of milk, birds will not have to go out in search of prey, beasts and men will give up even their natural enmity, fearsome beings and demons will cease to molest men, and human beings with defective limbs will not be born. Those that are born then and hear the *Dharma* from Him will cease to be born again. Hoping to be born then and to hear him, I have, in birth after birth, made it my business to praise constantly the feet of My Lord, who acquired the knowledge at the root of the *Bodhi* tree. Manimekalai, you have to do certain things in this city. It is only after that that your mind will reach the proper state for receiving the *Buddha Dharma* that I want to teach you. These two ladies have been born with you because of the merit they acquired by worshipping the Buddha-feet at Gridhrakuta. In your company they will get rid of the results of all their previous *karma* and attain the state of *Nirvana*. You have obtained possession of Aputra's marvellous alms-bowl, the wand of life. Go and destroy the hunger of all living beings by means of it. There is only one act of charity, whether it be to the sages or to ordinary human beings, and, that is, relief of suffering and hunger." Manimekalai assented.

CHAPTER 8

Aputra's Story

The great sage proceeded: "This marvellous bowl belonged once to Aputra. He was the son of a Brahman lady, Sali, the wife of Abhanjika, a Brahman of Benares, by adultery. Sali went on a pilgrimage to the bathing ghats in Kanya Kumari,[1] erected by the monkey hosts,[2] in order to get rid of her sin by bathing in the holy waters there, where the three oceans meet. A day's march from Korkai, the Pandyan capital, she delivered a son, and abandoned him in a lonely plantain grove. A cow went to the spot, on hearing the cry of the child, and licked the child, and gave it milk. A childless Brahman of an adjoining village, Vayanangode, called Ilambhuti, passed that way, then, along with his wife, found the child, and gave it to his wife. They brought the child up as their own, and educated him properly, and invested him with the holy thread.

"One day, a Brahman of that village wanted to sacrifice a cow in what is known as a *Gomedha-yaga*. He had all the preliminary ceremonies done, and had the cow tied up outside his house, ready for the grand sacrifice the next morning. Aputra was a great opponent of cow-sacrifice, and resolved to prevent this one. In the night, he

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1. Cape Comorin, the Land's End of India. Here, it means the Setu.

2. A clear reference to the Ramayana.

cut the rope by which the cow was tied, and took the cow away. But, shortly after he had left, the priest came to see the cow, and found it missing. He raised a hue and cry. A crowd of Brahmans assembled. They followed the foot-prints of the cow and Aputra, and caught Aputra with the cow. They began belabouring Aputra. The priest tried to seize the cow, but it gored him on his belly, and caused his omentum to protrude. Pressing it with his hands, he shouted for vengeance. The Brahmans thereupon beat Aputra mercilessly. They asked him whether he was the son of a cow that he should rescue it. He retorted that a poor and noble animal, like the cow, which was the foster-mother of humanity, should not be sacrificed. Tney quoted the Vedas in support of the sacrifice. Then he condemned the Vedas for approving of such a sacrifice. They were all horrified. One of them, who knew about Sali and the abandonment of Aputra by her, said, 'No wonder he is opposed to the Vedas', and proclaimed the truth about his parentage and birth. Then Ilambhuti disclaimed him, and he was driven out of the village. He could not get any alms anywhere in that locality. So he went to Madura where he used to sleep in the front courtyard of the Sarasvati temple and go out and beg in the streets and feed the deaf, the dumb, the maimed, the diseased and the hungry with the proceeds first before he himself ate. One day, when asleep, some hungry people woke him up and asked him for food. He had nothing with him. He begged of the goddess Sarasvati, and she gave him this

bowl, telling him, 'Even if the whole country is stricken with famine, this bowl will ever remain inexhaustible, and the alms put into it by a pious soul will never get exhausted. Give as much as you like, there will be no exhaustion unless it be of the hands that receive.' Receiving the bowl with great joy and gratitude, he offered thanks to the goddess, and, getting alms from a chaste woman, attended immediately to the wants of all those who were hungry, to their entire satisfaction. Thereafter he made it his business to provide food for all living beings that he could reach so much so that the yard of the temple where he lived became filled with people, animals and birds wanting food.

"Intimation of this extraordinary charity was received by Indra, by the usual quiver visible in the white carpet, on which is placed this throne. The god appeared before Aputra immediately, in the shape of an old Brahman doubled up with age, to give him whatever boon he wanted, so that his throne might not be imperilled by charity even exceeding his.* The old man told him that he was no other than Indra, and that he had gone there in order to give him whatever boon that he might ask, as he greatly appreciated the merit of the great gift of food that he was making from day to day. On hearing this, Aputra laughed in scorn till his sides ached, and said:— 'People that practise true *Dharma*, people who disinterestedly

* The Indian belief is that the greatest sacrificer will become Indra.

take care of others and protect them from harm, people who practise penance, people who do deeds without attachment and desire for fruits, these do not do so craving for any boon. Nor do they covet the heaven of the *Devas*. Oh Lord of the *Devas*! I want nothing of you. I want nothing more than this bowl which enables me to satisfy the unquenchable hunger of those that feel hungry and enjoy the sight of their satisfied countenances. I wish for nothing more.' Indra got wroth at this proud and scornful attitude of his, and secretly vowed vengeance. Returning to his place, he sent down an abundance of rain, and made the whole of the Pandya kingdom smile with cultivation and prosperity, so that there was not one creature wanting sustenance. Aputra soon found there was no room for the exercise of his charity, and, leaving his place, he went out in search of those that might need his help. Finding none in India, he was going about like one forlorn, when some of those who had recently arrived from overseas, from the country of Savakam,* told him that in that country there was a famine prevalent at the time owing to the failure of rain and that a great number of the inhabitants had died. He immediately made up his mind to travel to that land with his bowl in order that he might relieve the suffering there and find an opportunity for the exercise of his charity. He took ship with this object along with other passengers. Being overtaken by a storm, the ship had to

* Sumatra.

halt at Manipallavam on the way. The ship set sail again at dead of night in the belief that all the passengers were in. Aputra, however, got left out, and, being distressed at this great disappointment, resolved to give up life rather than live uselessly in that uninhabited island, the bowl of miraculous power also being now of no service. He, therefore, threw the bowl into that lotus pool with a *gomuka* (cow's mouth spout) with a prayer that it might reappear on the surface of the water one day in the year, on his birth-day. He further wished that if ever any one appeared on that occasion who made it his life's work to exercise charity and protect all living beings, the bowl should pass into his hands. Having done this, he went without food or drink, and thus passed out of existence. As this was taking place, I happened to be there, and, in reply to my enquiry, he gave me the whole history before giving up his life. Aputra has been born again in the land of Savakam from the cow of the king of the country very much like the sun which, having risen in the east, destroys darkness, and gives up its light in the west, only to rise again in the east.

"The cow that had fostered Aputra for seven days from birth was re-born at Dhavalamalai, in Savakanadu, near where a holy sage, Nanmukha,* was doing penance. It had horns and hoofs of gold, and gave copious milk even before it calved. Nanmukha, who knew the past, present and

* Four-headed. A name of Brahma.

future, declared that the cow would give birth to a hero from a golden egg it would lay. His prediction came true. Aputra was born, from a golden egg laid by the cow, on the full moon day in the month of Vaisakh, like the Buddha himself. There was a drizzle of holy water as at the appearance of the Buddha himself. All the holy men of Chakravalakottam were astonished at this and went to the statue on the pillar for explanation. The deity of the pillar told them that the extraordinary phenomenon signified the re-birth of Aputra in Savakanadu. The King of Savakam at the time, Bhumichandra, had for long been exercised in mind because he had no heir. In one of his visits to *Rishi* Nanmukha he was presented with the child that was born of the cow, and he brought it up as his own. That boy has now come of age and he is ruling over the land." Addressing Manimekalai again, the sage said: "While the great river Kaveri flows, living beings in the vicinity suffer for lack of food. Therefore you should not keep this alms-bowl unused. It will be as if the gods should keep the vessel containing the celestial ambrosia, after they have taken their fill, unused for others."

CHAPTER 9

The Magic Bowl

On hearing this, Manimekalai paid her obeisance to the sage, and, assuming the form of a nun, and with the bowl in her hand, passed into the streets. Immediately, there gathered around her a crowd, much like the crowd that had collected round Yaugandharayana when he assumed the disgusting disguise of a man suffering from disease and entered the streets of Ujjain for the purpose of releasing Udayana,* his master, from the prison into which Pradyota, the king, had thrown him. The people wondered that this handsome damsel, who had won the heart of Udayakumara, should thus have made her debut in the royal streets of Puhar with the begging bowl in her hand.

Kayasandikai was in that crowd. She said to Manimekalai, "I am suffering from 'elephant hunger', a disease with unappeasable hunger as its main symptom, for the last twelve years. Can this bowl give enough food to satisfy my hunger too?"

"Undoubtedly," said Manimekalai. "The bowl will never tire of giving. It is only your hand which will tire of receiving."

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* Udayana was the king of Vatsa, Yaugandharayana was his prime minister. See "Pratijnayaugandharayana" in my "Two Plays of Bhasa."

"Then, I have hopes of getting rid of this horrible disease which has blasted my life," said Kayasandikai. "Pray, be quick about it."

"I want to take the first alms from the best among the chaste women of this locality," said Manimekalai.

"That is quite easy for me to tell you," said Kayasandikai. "You see the house opposite. There lives, now, with her husband, in ideal happiness, Adirai, the best among the chaste women of this locality. Her husband, Saduvan, was once a merchant prince. He took a fancy for a dancing girl, and spent all his wealth on her. When his wealth was gone, the dancing girl shut her doors on him, and took to another rich lover. When the chagrined, crushed Saduvan returned home, he found no change in his wife. She did not convey, by word or deed, that her love for him had diminished to the least extent. To retrieve his fortunes, and to do his duty by his wife, Saduvan went abroad in a trading vessel. His ship was wrecked on the return journey. A few escaped and came here and reported the news. All believed that the remaining passengers were lost. Adirai wanted to commit *sati*, but the flames would not touch her, and a voice said to her, 'Get down from the pyre, you chaste woman! Your husband is not dead. He will return'. And so he did. He had held on to a plank and had been washed ashore on one of the Naga islands. There, the Nagas, who are cannibals, went eagerly to eat him up. But he knew the language of the

Nagas, and asked them to kill him, if they liked, but not to eat him, as such a sin would never be forgiven by God. The Naga chief then spared his life, and gave him some chickens to eat, some liquor to drink, and a young and beautiful dancing girl as his mate. He refused all, saying, 'Why should I take the lives of these chickens in order to keep my life going for a while? Why should I take drink and get more intoxicated when I am not sober enough, even without it, to control my lust, greed and anger? Why should I want this dancing girl when I have a loving wife and have learnt the nature of dancing girls? Give me some rice and vegetables for food, some pure water for drink, and some wise men for companions.' The Chief was very pleased, gave him those things, and asked him, 'Tell us some way of improving without giving up meat-eating, and drinking and the company of these young women'. Saduvan told him, 'Don't eat men, and don't kill ship-wrecked persons, but help them to the best of your ability. These things you can do easily, and are the first steps in the ladder leading the soul to God, after death'. 'What proof is there that anything survives death?' asked the chief. 'When alive, we feel and experience all kinds of pains and pleasures. When dead, we cease to do so, and do not feel even our bodies being burnt. Is it not obvious that the person who was experiencing, what I call the soul, has left? And, is it not obvious, that it must have gone somewhere else, what I call the other world? So, let our actions be calculated to

bring about our welfare not only in this world but in the other world also', said Saduvan. This went home. The Chief and his men swore to abide by this advice.

"Some time later, Chandradatta's fleet was sighted. It was avoiding the notorious island. But Saduvan signalled to it, that the islanders were now friendly, and made Chandradatta call at the main port. Then the Chief put Saduvan on board with gold, sandalwood, aloes, and fine silks and cottons, from the accumulated loot of hundreds of ships wrecked off that coast, and Saduvan reached Kaveripattinam safe and rich. He fell at his wife's feet, and told her, 'Oh chastest among women, your virtues are responsible for saving me from a horrible death.' He is now living happily with her. Come along, let us go to Adirai's house."

Manimekalai went to the house and cried out, "Lady of the house, come and give alms!"

Adirai came out with a smiling face, circumambulated round Manimekalai, and filled her bowl with the finest food, saying: "May this satisfy your hunger and that of all those who come to feed from this bowl!" Manimekalai fed the numerous persons around her from the bowl.

Kayasandikai said to her, "Will this bowl satisfy my hunger too? My hunger is so great, that though I take as much food as the hills of stone brought by the army of monkeys to enable

Rama, the *avatar** of Vishnu, to construct the causeway across the sea, it is not satisfied."

"Stretch forth your hands," said Manimekalai, "this bowl will never fail."

Kayasandikai stretched forth her hands. A continuous stream of food went from the bowl into her hands, and disappeared, down her capacious throat, into her expanding belly. At first, it looked as if her hunger would never be satisfied, as if the stream was getting lost in a desert. But, finally, Kayasandikai exclaimed, "Enough! Enough! My hunger is appeased! My curse has ended!"

"What curse?" asked Manimekalai. "Who are you, and how did you contract this disease?"

* An incarnation.

CHAPTER 10

Kayasandikai's Story

"I am Kayasandikai, the wife of a *Vidyadhara*[1] called Kanchana from Kanchanapura in Mount Kailasa, in the far north. We were going to the Podiyil Hills, at the source of the *Tamraparni*,[2] on a picnic. On the way, when I was having a love quarrel with my husband, on the banks of a lovely forest stream, I unwarily trod on, and spoilt, a fine rose-apple, as big as a palm fruit, kept on a teak leaf by an old Brahman sage called Vrischika who had gone into the stream to bathe, preparatory to breaking his twelve years' fast with this divine fruit which could be got only once in twelve years. A second after my misadventure, Vrischika came to the spot, was desolate at seeing his fruit crushed and rendered useless, and cursed me as follows: 'May you, who walked about, when you knew to fly, and did this clumsy act, forget the art of flying for twelve years! And, may you, who have made me lose my twelve-yearly meal, never have your hunger appeased for twelve years from now!' Then he left. I found hunger gnawing at me. I could not also rise into the air and fly. My husband took pity on me, and brought me heaps and heaps of fruits and roots from all over the forest. But, my hunger was unappeased. He then advised me

1. A semi-celestial being.

2. A river in Tinnevelly, in the far south.

to come and settle down in this great city of Puhar, by the mighty Kaveri, saying to me, 'That is the granary of the South. It is the city in all Jambudvipa* noted for its choultries and charities. There, if anywhere, you can get food to keep your hunger down. I too can see you every year there, at the Indra festival.' I came here accordingly, and have been here, feeding on charity, and trying to keep my hunger down, for the last twelve years. Now, my curse is over. Thanks to this bowl and you, I am no longer hungry. I also feel my limbs aching to fly. That faculty too must have returned. Good-bye, good lady. I must fly to Kanchanapura and meet my dear, dear husband. Go to the rest-house inside Chakravalakottam, where the great ones are doing penance in order to destroy suffering in the world. Feed those who suffer from hunger and resort there for food."

Kayasandikai then flew away northward to Kanchanapura. Manimekalai went to the rest-house indicated, circumambulated it thrice, and worshipped the guardian goddess of the city, in thought, word and deed. She then went to the hall where the hungry and the destitute were, and her advent there, with the bowl, was as welcome as that of a shower of rain in a parched-up country. She went on giving food from the bowl to the innumerable destitutes there, and hope and joy were seen once more on faces which had not reflected them for years.

TAMIL NADU ARCHIVES ACC. No.

* India.

CHAPTER 11

Chitrapati Tempts The Prince

Manimekalai continued to remain in the rest-house dressed as a nun, distributing alms to the poor. Chitrapati, her grand-mother, heard of this, and her anger knew no bounds. Calling for a meeting of dancing-girls, she said to them, "What a shame is this! A girl born in our community, and overflowing with beauty and charm, to put on a nun's robes and waste her glorious youth in doing charity like a Brahman widow! Fie on her! We, dancing girls, are like bees going from flower to flower, leaving a flower without a second thought, as soon as its honey is exhausted. We are like lutes which pass from hand to hand when the owners die or become bankrupt. I will make this girl leave her nun's robes and seat herself on Udayakumara's car as his mistress. He loves her, and will give her any amount of wealth. If I fail to do this, you may put seven burnt bricks on my head, take me round the Palace Dance Hall, in ignominious procession, and outcast me."

She then went to the palace, interviewed Udayakumara, told him where Manimekalai was, and asked him to go to the rest-house and take her as his mistress, saying that, under the rules of the community, she could give her away. Udayakumara told her that a goddess had warned him, in a dream to leave Manimekalai alone, lest

he should come to grief. Chitrapati laughed, and said, "Don't you believe in such dreams, my prince! Even gods are moved by beauty. Did not Indra approach Ahalya? Did not Agni consort with the wives of the sages? Did not Sasanka seduce Tara? None but the brave deserve the fair! And you kings ought to see that dancing-girls do not abandon their duties."

CHAPTER 12

Udayakumara and Manimekalai

Encouraged by her, Udayakumara went to the rest-house and saw Manimekalai distributing food there. He asked her, " Why have you adopted these ascetic robes ? "

Manimekalai made a profound obeisance to him, both as the Crown Prince, and as her husband in her previous birth, and told him, ' Birth, growth and decay, disease and death, oh prince, are the lot of the body. So, for the sake of the soul, I have taken these robes, and dedicated my life to religion and charity.'

Seeing him looking at her only with growing admiration and love, she deemed it fit to change her form, in order to escape from his importunities. She asked to be excused for a moment, went into the temple of Champapati, uttered the *mantra* taught to her by the goddess, changed into the form of Kayasandikai, and came out taking the begging bowl with her.

Udayakumara was perplexed. Where had Manimekalai, the beloved of his heart, gone ? He rushed into the temple, prostrated before the idol of Champapati, and said, " Oh goddess, tell me where Manimekalai has gone, leaving her begging bowl with Kayasandikai. I shall not leave this place till you tell me." A figure in a painting

by his side said to him, "You are rash in making such a vow. It will come to nought."

Udayakumara was impressed by this voice, which confirmed so strangely the warning of the goddess in the dream. So, he rose, and went back to the palace, resolving to do nothing rash but to find out the truth about Manimekalai.

Manimekalai retained her form of Kayasandikai, seeing in it the one sure protection against Udayakumara's importunities. She went all round the city with her bowl, feeding the poor everywhere.

CHAPTER 13

Prison Made Almshouse

Finally, she went, one day, to the chief prison, and fed the numerous half-starved and hungry prisoners there. The Superintendent, wardens and guards were astonished at her ability to feed so many from a single bowl,,and resolved to report the marvel to the king.

Mavankilli, the king, visited the pleasure gardens along with his wife, Siritti, descended from the emperor Mahabali. He pointed out to his queen two peacocks and a swan, dancing together in the gardens, and compared them to Krishna, Subhadra and Balarama. He compared also a bamboo and a *Kadamba* tree, standing side by side there, to Krishna and Balarama. He and Siritti finished their visit to the gardens, and entered the marvellously beautiful garden palace built with the skill of the Tamil architect, the Mahratta sculptor, the Avanti blacksmith, the Yavana carpenter, and the Magadhan jeweller. It had pillars of corals, pendants of pearls, and a canopy of gold.

The king and queen were reclining on a magnificent couch in the hall of this wonderful building when the Jail Superintendent entered and said that a woman called Kayasandikai, suffering from 'elephant-hunger' till recently, had gone to the prison and fed all the prisoners from a bowl

whose contents appeared to be inexhaustible. The king at once sent for Manimekalai, who was disguised as Kayasandikai, and questioned her.

She said, "May the rains never fail! May the earth always yield abundant crops! May the king never do evil! I am the daughter of a *Vidyadhara*, and have been wandering about the city in disguise. A goddess gave me this marvellous bowl which cures even 'elephant-hunger'. I want to eradicate hunger from this country."

"Capital!" said the king. "I too am interested in it. Ask for any boon you like, for this great service, and I shall grant it."

"Pull down that horrible prison of yours, and build, in its place, almshouses for the poor," said Manimekalai.

"All right," said the king, and gave orders accordingly. Soon, the gloomy prison was a forgotten memory, and in its place stood delightful almshouses resounding with hymns and prayers. There was a pedestal for the Buddha, residential rooms for students, and kitchens and dining halls galore. Manimekalai distributed food daily in those dining halls, and lived in Chakravalakottam.

CHAPTER 14

Udayakumara's End

Udayakumara went to Chakravalakottam and began to entertain a deep-rooted suspicion that Manimekalai had assumed the form of Kayasandikai. Just as he entered the hall where she was, Kanchana, who had been searching for Kayasandikai all over the town, as her period of curse was over and yet she had not returned to him, went there. On seeing Manimekalai in her disguise, he mistook her for Kayasandikai, and went to embrace her with warmth, crying out: "So, some god, out of pity, has given you this feeding bowl, my darling!" He was astonished to see no reciprocating warmth on her side. She edged away from him, and began talking familiarly and intimately to Udayakumara who had come in just then. Pointing out an old woman there, to him, she said to him, "Great prince, this lady must have been very beautiful once, much more beautiful than I am now. And, yet, see her now! Her hair is gray, her skin is shrivelled, her colour has faded, her looks are jaded. Such is the fate of the body in every case. So, leave off all desire for the body, and take to higher things!" Udayakumara was not convinced, and his eyes showed unmistakable love for her. He felt confirmed in his belief that this was only Manimekalai in disguise. As for Kanchana, he was wroth at Kayasandikai's indifference to him and her familiarity with Udayakumara whom he considered to be

making love to her and to have stolen her affections from him. Embarrassed by Kanchana's presence, Udayakumara resolved to visit Manimekalai at night, in secret, and left, after telling her, "I shall come to you later on, and have a talk with you."

Kanchana guessed that the prince would come secretly in the night to visit Kayasandikai. So, he lay in wait for him, that night, with his sword specially sharpened.

Udayakumara went there at midnight, prompted by his great love for Manimekalai. Kanchana sprang on him suddenly and cut him into two with his sword. Then he went to drag the horrified Manimekalai by the arm, mistaking her for Kayasandikai, shouting out, "Quick! Let us fly back to Kanchanapura!" But the divine statue in the pillar said to him, "Approach her not, oh Kanchana! This is not your wife Kayasandikai. She is Manimekalai who has assumed your wife's disguise in order to escape from the importunities of Udayakumara who had become infatuated with her. Your wife, Kayasandikai, in her eagerness to meet you, forgot the rules of flying in this country, and flew over the temple of the goddess Kali, in her form as Vindhyavasini, at the gate of the Deccan, and was promptly caught up by the death ray sent out by the dread goddess, and destroyed, as a punishment for this insult. You have killed this prince unjustly. But it is his *karma*, and you are only an instrument."

Kanchana heard the story, in wonder and sorrow, and then left for Kailasa, in a sad and penitent mood.

Manimekalai had woke up on hearing the sound of Kanchana's sword cutting the prince in two. She saw Kanchana then rush towards her, and heard the words of the statue to him, and saw Kanchana go away.

Flabbergasted at the turn events had taken, she assumed her own real form, and wanted to go and take the mutilated body of Udayakumara, put it on her lap, and weep, as he was her husband in her previous birth, and had won her heart even in this. She cried out :—"When in our previous birth, you died of the cobra *Dhirishta Visha*,* I entered the fire along with you; when last I saw you in the pleasure garden in this city the goddess Manimekalai carried me away to Manipallavam, seeing that my mind was attracted to you. There, by means of the miraculous Buddha-seat the goddess gave me knowledge of our previous births and relationship. As I understood your relationship to me, I cherished affection for you even in this life. I wished to wean you from the evils of life by pointing out the inevitable cycle of births and deaths, and of the consequences of good and bad deeds. I assumed the form of Kayasandikai to keep you from lusting for my body. My evil fate it is that you should have thus fallen by the sword of the Vidyadhara." So

* One whose sight is death!

saying she approached the dead body of the prince. But, as she was going towards his corpse, the god of the statue said to her, "Don't approach him, Manimekalai. He was your husband not only in your previous birth but also in several births before. But, you have now put your foot on the path which leads to *Nirvana*, and to salvation from births and deaths. So, desist from these exhibitions of human passion."

She asked the god, "Are you the god who knows all truths?"

"Yes. I am Tuvadikan, the god of this statue, and I know everything," was the reply.

"Tell me, then, what *Karma* made my husband die by snake-bite in his last birth, and by the sword of Kanchana in this birth," said Manimekalai.

"At your camp on the Kayamkarai river, he and you invited the sage, Brahmadharma, for breakfast. Your cook was rather late in getting the breakfast ready and kept the sage waiting. Your husband was very angry with him for it. The poor cook, finally, came with the breakfast, boiling hot, but, at the sight of the angry face of your husband, got nervous, and slipped and fell down, dropping all the dishes, and spilling the contents. In a rage, your husband took his sword and cut the cook in two. His death by snake-bite was the punishment for his anger, and his death at the hands of Kanchana is the punishment for his cruel hacking of the cook."

Manimekalai shed tears for the fate of Udayakumara, and asked the god of the statue about her own future. The god said: " You will be thrown into prison by the king and released at the instance of the queen. Then, escaping from terrible dangers, you will go to Savakanadu, meet Aputra, born there as Punyaraja, take him to Manipallavam and make him remember his former birth. Then he will return to his country. You will be foretold about the destruction of Puhar. You will then go to Vanji and worship at your mother's temple and then learn from various teachers the truth about their creeds and dogmas, assuming the form of an old hermit. You will hear there, from Kovalan's father, about the destruction of Puhar by a tidal wave, and of the flight of your mother, Sutamati, and Aravana Adigal to Kanchi, and will hear also about a terrible famine at Kanchi. You will, therefore, go to Kanchi with your begging bowl and relieve suffering there. Then, you will be instructed about *Dharma*[1] and *Tapas*[2] and the true meaning and purpose of life by Aravana Adigal. You will then become an ascetic for good, and set your feet firmly on the road shown by the Buddha to salvation. After several rebirths, all in Magadha, and all as a male, you will finally attain *Nirvana*."[3]

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1. The eternal law of Righteousness.
2. Penance for the benefit of all beings.
3. Salvation.

CHAPTER 15

A Just King

Manimekalai heard all this, and becalmed her mind. The morning broke. Early visitors to the temple of the goddess Champapati found the prince's body lying there, cut in two. They were horrified, and went and told the holy hermits of Chakravalakottam. The hermits went and questioned Manimekalai. She told them all that she knew. The holy ones went to the palace. Their leader told the king about many instances in the past when guilty love-making had led to death. "Kakandan, had been put on the throne by his father, Kantama, on the advice of Agastya and Durga, as he was but a concubine's son, and not a Kshatriya, and would not, therefore, be killed by Parasurama who had vowed to kill all Kshatriya kings. He was a very valiant and just king. His second son made overtures to Marudi, a Brahman woman, on her return from a bath in the Kaveri. She went at once to the guardian deity of the city and cried out: 'In this land chaste wives, who can command even the rains to come, should not cause carnal desire in the hearts of others. I am not aware of having at any time done anything undutiful to my husband. So, how could I rouse carnal feelings in this prince? I have heard from the wise that you will bind with your rope those of evil deeds, even though they should do them secretly, and, destroying them, would eat them up. Have you become

false to your charge as you do not appear to be doing that act of justice now to him?" So saying, she wept aloud at the foot of the statue of the guardian-deity. The deity appeared to her and said: 'You have not understood properly the meaning of that particular passage of the truthful bard,[1] which says that the clouds will rain at the command of a chaste wife who worships no other god but her husband. You are accustomed in life to hear false stories, and have also shown an enjoyment of lascivious and erotic stories. Your devotion to the gods and their worship had in it a desire to hear music, to see dances and otherwise enjoy the festivities. Therefore it is that, though you are a chaste wife, you have not the power to command the clouds to rain, and that you have failed to burn the heart of this man who cherished an evil thought about you.[2] Of course, as you were not to blame for this act of the prince, my rope will not bind you, and my weapons will not punish you, as in the case of women who willingly seduce men. The law allows seven days' time for the king to punish an offender. Before that limit of time, if he should fail to punish the prince, I shall inflict the punishment myself. You may rest assured that within the seven days' limit, Kakanda, hearing of what has happened, will decapitate the prince.' As the deity declared, the prince was cut into two

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1. Tiruvalluvar. He says so in verse 55 of his immortal work, "The Kural."

2. As Damayanti did the lustful savage who molested her.

by the king himself, when he had heard of the prince's misconduct. That is not all. As if to test the king, the first son too misbehaved. He wanted to make a chaste Vaisya maiden, Visakai, his mistress by putting on her a garland from his neck. The king had him also beheaded, though he was his heir and only remaining son. No wonder, this city is called Kakandi after this just monarch. Oh king, out of the five deadly sins, murder, theft, drink and lying can be, with a great effort brought under control. The fifth, lust, requires the supremest effort of all, and it has been, for that reason, laid down that a sage should conquer lust as a condition precedent."

"Does such misconduct occur at this time also? If so, let me know at once. Whoever the person be, he shall be punished forthwith," said the king.

"Oh! great king," said the sage, "having heard of the tragic death of her lover, Kovalan, Madhavi, his mistress, became a Buddhist nun, along with her daughter, Manimekalai. Our prince, Udayakumara, was infatuated with Manimekalai, and followed her everywhere, consumed by a desire to possess her. She assumed the form of a Vidyadhara woman, Kayasandikai, in order to escape from his importunities. He pursued her even then. Vidyadhara Kanchana, the husband of Kayasandikai, mistook him to be making love to his wife, Kayasandikai, and cut him in two at dead of night in the guests' hall."

Having heard this, the king, without the slightest expression of sorrow for the death of his son, sent for his commander-in-chief and said to him, "The Vidyadhara deserves my thanks for having done to the erring prince what I should have done to him myself. The rigid observances of *Rishis* and the chastity of good women will have no chance of survival if they do not receive efficient protection from the king. Before other kings come to know that my unfortunate son was guilty of such an act, coming as I do of the family of him who drove his car over the body of his son, because of a neglectful act of his, order the cremation of the dead body. Let Manimekalai also be kept in prison for her own protection from Udayakumara's friend and from the angry mob grieving for their prince." The orders were carried out.

CHAPTER 16

An Angry Queen

The Queen, Siritti, was extremely grieved to hear about her son's death. Her wrath against Manimekalai, whom she considered to be a mere public woman, for having indirectly brought it about, by withholding her favours from him, and by assuming Kayasandikai's form, knew no bounds. Vasantavvai, a very old woman who had the privilege of instructing the king, the prince, and the ladies of the royal household in what was good, and of offering consolation to them on the occurrence of sad events, went to the queen and, without letting her give way to sorrow, made the usual salutations, and said:— "Our kings and princes meet their death in winning victories, in protecting their subjects and in annexing the kingdoms of inimically disposed neighbours ; and if perchance they die of age without falling in battle like warriors, they are given a funeral with military honours, by their body being laid on a bed of *dharbha* grass by Brahmans, and cut in two, as though they fell in battle. No monarch of this land has died a natural death by reaching ripe old age. To say so will be a libel on this Kshatriya dynasty. Your son's end is not fitting his line and rank. •Show, therefore, no sorrow for his death in the presence of the king, who is the soul of justice. Punish this horrible dancing girl in secret."

Owing to her advice, the Queen concealed her grief and anger and pleaded with the king that Manimekalai should not be kept in prison, as she had done nothing wrong, and that she should be allowed to keep her safely in a room in her own quarters.

"Certainly," said the king. "I only want her safety to be ensured".

The Queen accordingly kept her in a room in her quarters. She fumigated the room with the poison gas got from *dhatura** seeds, in order to bring about madness. But the goddess Manimekalai interfered and neutralised the effect completely. Then the queen sent a wild young man, strong as a bull, lustful as a hare, into Manimekalai's room, one night, in order to ravish her, in revenge for her refusal of her favours to Udayakumara, and to publish the act widely. He rushed in eagerly, but went out even more precipitately, as he found only a gigantic and ferocious man, jet black in colour, with red rolling eyes, and teeth like the tusks of a wild boar, inside the room, instead of the charming maiden he had expected, and hankered after. He did not know, of course, that Manimekalai had changed her form like that with the aid of the goddess's *mantra*. As soon as he got out of the place, he fled from the Chola country, so that he might not be ordered again to face such dangers.

* The thorn-apple. Eating the seeds is said to be sure to bring about madness.

The Queen was chagrined at finding Manimekalai, who had resumed her form by then, uninjured, and the wild young man gone. Under the pretext that Manimekalai was ill, she had her shut up in a room with a floor of iron plates which she got heated from below in order to kill her. But this too had no effect, thanks to the goddess who protected Manimekalai.

CHAPTER 17

The Queen Repents

The Queen was now convinced that Manimekalai was being protected by divine beings. So, she went to her, confessed everything, and begged her pardon, saying, "I did all these wicked deeds because of my love for my son, and my anger at his death which was indirectly due to you. Understand my mother's feelings, and forgive me."

"You are a deluded woman," said Manimekalai. "Did you love his body or his soul? If you loved his body, why did you allow it to be burnt? If you loved his soul, why did you not know about his previous birth, and weep for him when he died of snake-bite as my husband Rahula?"

"Your husband!" said the Queen.

Manimekalai then told her the whole story of their previous births, and said, "If you loved his soul, you would have seen it in every living thing in the world and loved all beings, for the soul, oh queen, is only one, the bodies alone being different. There are no individual souls. Anger, oh queen, is a great enemy. So is lust. Listen. Once, the beautiful wife of an artisan was beaten mercilessly by her husband who unjustly suspected her of unchastity, and drove her out of his house, into the streets, keeping her son, a boy of three, with him. Angered by this outrageous conduct

of his, she went to a distant town and lived as a prostitute, hiring her body out to every person who paid the price. Years passed, and she became rich, and lived in a big mansion. One day, her son, who was now a tall young man, went to her, and knew her. Then, because of some special fascination for the young man, she asked him his name and residence, and discovered, to her horror, that he was her son. She shrieked, like one mad, and told him the horrible truth. He jumped from the terrace of her house and died. She rushed to the backyard, jumped into the deep well there, and put an end to her life. Such is the effect of lust and anger, oh queen."

The queen prostrated before Manimekalai for enlightening her in such high spiritual truths. Manimekalai raised her up, and prostrated before the queen, and said, "You are in the position of a mother-in-law to me, and should not prostrate before me. You are also the queen, and should not prostrate before a subject, like me." The queen embraced her, and shed tears of repentance for the evil things that she had contemplated for her. Manimekalai also shed tears.

"Why are you weeping?" asked the Queen.

"Before whom shall I weep if not before you, my mother-in-law? I weep for my beloved who is dead. I weep for my bad *karma* which has brought about his death," said Manimekalai.

"But you did nothing bad," said the Queen. "All people praise you."

"If people praise me, they are mistaken. I am not happy. Hidden from all eyes except the Buddha's, alone, by myself, I know what I did, and how my hidden passion for him egged him on and led him to his sad end. To whom shall I go and reveal the anguish of my heart, which now flows out through the eyes, in the shape of tears, to mingle with yours? You lost your son, and I my husband."

The two women embraced each other in silence and tears.

CHAPTER 18

Manimekalai Goes to Savakanadu

Chitrapati heard of Manimekalai's imprisonment, and resolved to beg of the Queen to release her in order that she might, become the head of the "121 dancing girls" after her. She went to the Queen and made the request. She told her: "Madhavi's becoming a nun and Manimekalai's going from house to house with a begging-bowl in her hand and taking alms, are unbecoming of the life of a dancing woman, and provoke only laughter and derision in the community. Never have such strange and unbecoming events taken place since the institution of 121 dancing girls * was set up in this country. Manimekalai's presence in the City has been the cause of destruction to the prince already. She may, by virtue of her detention, here, cause the destruction of the city itself through the goddess Manimekalai, whose name she bears, in pursuance of the curse of Indra owing to king Killi's failure to observe the Indra festival one year due to his grief for the desertion of his sweet-heart, the Naga Princess

* This number was, of course, the original number of dancing girls, at the inception of this institution. The figure, 11 x 11, is significant, as eleven will not be divisible by any number below 10 and thus represented dancing girls who never married any one. Fixed numbers were also the rule for other institutions at inception. Thus, when Tamil Brahmans were employed as officials by the kings, they formed the *Ashtasahasram*, or the eight thousand. When Andhra Brahmans were similarly employed, they formed the *Aruvela*, or six thousand, *Niyogi* Brahmans.

Pilivalai, and the supposed death, by shipwreck, of his son by her. So, release her and hand her over to me."

The Queen smiled, sent for Manimekalai, and, in her presence, told Chitrapati, "Manimekalai will not go to you, or enter your house. Your life involves the taking to liquor, the uttering of lies, the indulgence in promiscuous love, the killing of animals, and preoccupation with filthy thoughts. So, go away."

Chitrapati did not even dare to appeal to Manimekalai, whose very attitude showed her entire concurrence with the sentiments expressed by the Queen. So, she stood there dumbfounded.

Meanwhile, Madhavi was desolate with grief at hearing that Manimekalai was in custody. After consulting Sutamati, she went and fell at the feet of Aravana Adigal, and, taking that holy man, went to the Queen, in order to secure her release. The queen and her attendants, and Chitrapati and Manimekalai, all saluted the venerable sage respectfully. The sage blessed them all. The queen showed him a suitable seat, and, after washing his feet, and offering him the hospitality due, said:— "Venerable sir, that you should have come to see me in spite of your advanced age, is due to my good fortune. You must live for many many years for the good of the world!"

"Good queen," said the sage, "I am like the setting sun, and will pass away soon. Birth, growth, disease, decay and death are all inevitable

for those born. If people but understand the real character of the causes and conditions of existence, the twelve *nidanas*[1] namey, ignorance, vain acts, hankering, egotism, clinging to name and form, domination by the organs of sense, attachment to contact and feeling sensory pleasures, thirst for pleasure, attachment to the world, desire to become something, birth and decay and death, they will know ultimate happiness. If they do not understand it correctly, they are doomed to suffer in hell. Among the three worlds, this world of life is limitless, and living beings in this world fall into six classes, namely human beings, divine beings, the Brahmas, the Nagas, the world of lower creatures, and that of evil spirits. As a result of good or bad deeds, beings are born in one or other of these classes. Evil deeds of the body consist in killing, stealing and giving way to passion. Lying, speaking evil of others, harsh words and indecent words, these four are evils in speech. Desire, anger and intolerance are evils of the mind. These ten deeds are evil, and, as their consequences are evil, the wise ones shun them. If these are not avoided carefully, one is born in the next birth as an animal or evil spirit or an inhabitant of Hell, and suffers agony. Good deeds consist in the avoidance of the ten evils detailed above, the adopting of the five prescribed lines of conduct[2] and the making of gifts

1. Hindrances.

2. These are, not to kill any living things, not to take anything of others not given, not to commit adultery, not to utter a lie, and not to take any intoxicant in any shape or form.

in true charity. Those that do so are born either as human beings or as Devas or even as Brahmas enjoying great happiness." Turning to Manimekalai, the sage said, " You know your previous birth already. If you go to me after learning the teachings of other sects, I shall be delighted to explain to you more of this *Buddha Dharma.*

So saying, Aravana Adigal got up to leave. Manimekalai made a profound obeisance to him and exhorted the queen, her attendants and Chitrapati to bear in mind the teachings of the venerable one and to save the city. She then said to the sage:— "If I remain here, I shall not be happy. People will regard me as the woman who caused their prince's death. And, I too shall be perpetually reminded of that painful tragedy of errors on that unforgettable day. So, I shall go to Savakanadu, the country where Aputra, reborn as Punyaraja, is ruling now, take him to Manipallavam, and make him remember his past birth, as Aputra, before the Buddha seat, and then go to Vanji, do charity, worship at the temple of my mother Kannaki, and learn the tenets of the various sects and various creeds, and then come to you so that you may teach me the full *Buddha Dharma*, as promised by you."

Saying this, she bade them all farewell, and rose into the air, as the sun was setting, and, went to Chakravalakottam, and circumambulated the shrine of Champapati and the god's statue there, and flew to Nagapura in Savakanadu where

Punyaraja, son of Bhumichandra, was ruling in great prosperity.

"His advent marked the end of a twelve years' famine. Ever after he ascended the throne, rains have been regular, and crops bountiful," said a citizen, in reply to Manimekalai's query, on her landing there in a grove of flowering trees. Manimekalai attended a discourse by Dharma Sravaka, a sage, in that grove. Punyaraja was also present there. He was struck by Manimekalai's beauty, and by the begging bowl in her hand, and enquired of his followers who she was. His chamberlain, who had seen her at Puhar, told him that she was the famous miaden Manimekalai. He added, "In the whole of Jambudvipa, there is no one to match her in beauty, piety and charity."

When Punyaraja accosted her, she said to him, "Oh King, you have forgotten that this begging bowl was yours in your previous birth as Aputra who was abandoned by Sali and was saved by a cow," said Manimekalai.

"You know about my previous birth?" said Punyaraja, surprised. "Tell me all about it."

CHAPTER 19

Manipallavam Once More

"Go to Manipallavam, and circumambulate the Buddha seat there thrice," said Manimekalai, "and everything about your past birth will become clear to you. I am going there in advance, and shall meet you there."

With that, Manimekalai rose into the air and flew to Manipallavam. She asked the goddess Tivatilakai, who was there, "May I know why this miraculous seat was placed here by Indra? Why should it let us know our previous births?" To this the goddess replied:— "This seat will not allow any one other than the Enlightened One* to sit on it. Therefore Indra commanded that it might let those that worship it know their previous birth after the Enlightened One had occupied it."

Punyaraja, meanwhile, went and told his mother, Amarasundari, all that Manimekalai had told him. She then told him the strange story of his birth from a cow, and the circumstances under which he had become king. He thereupon resolved to abdicate and become a monk. But, his minister, Janamitra, said, "Remember, sire, that before we obtained you by favour of the holy one, this land of ours had suffered for twelve years from famine of such severity that mothers ate their children to appease their own hunger. Since your advent, rains have never failed, nor land its

* The Buddha.

fertility; living beings have never known hunger. If you should abdicate and retire, all your subjects will weep. If, for the sake of life, in a higher world, you choose to give up this, living beings here will suffer and die, and you will be held responsible for the calamity. This is not the teaching of the Buddha, who, unmindful of his own life or happiness, made it his duty to protect all living beings. You are labouring under a delusion." Hearing this, the king gave up his idea of abdicating. But, not being able to resist the desire to go and worship the Buddha-seat at Manipallavam, he begged of Janamitra to look after the kingdom during his absence, and went in a ship to Manipallavam, and met Manimekalai who was already there. After circumambulating the Buddha-seat twice, he remembered the full story of his previous birth. The goddess Tivatilakai appeared before him and Manimekalai, and showed them the place where the corpse of Aputra lay buried in the sand. She said, "This is also the place, where the eight *Settis** of Aputra's ship lie buried; they came back with the ship, after several days, in order to pick up Aputra, on discovering that he had been left behind. On finding him dead, they felt consience-stricken, for having brought about the death of such a good man by their carelessness in sailing away before he boarded the ship, and atoned for their sins, by starving themselves to death at this very spot. It is for you to say how far Aputra

* Chettis or Settis; Merchants. Sanskrit "Sreshti".

was responsible for their deaths by his rashly putting an end to his life before they arrived."

Turning to Manimekalai, the goddess explained to her how the city of her birth, Kaveripattinam, was swallowed up by the sea. "Pilivalai, the daughter of the king of Naga Nadu, after she had borne a son for the king of the solar race, was worshipping the Buddha-seat here when there arrived the ship of Kambala Setti from your city. Finding out who he was, she handed over the child to him with the message that the child was the Chola king's. Immensely pleased, the merchant took charge of the child and sailed away with it homewards. In the deep darkness of the night, the ship got wrecked near the Coromandel coast, and nobody knew in that confusion as to what had happened to the baby. Learning from such of them as escaped that the child was among those whose whereabouts were not known, the king, Vadivel Killi, set about searching for it everywhere, and, in his anxiety, forgot that the time had arrived for the celebration of the Indra festival. Goddess Manimekalai as the guardian deity, carried out the curse that the city be destroyed by the sea. Hence the destruction of Kaveripattinam. The king went away, like Indra, when the whole of his prosperity was also swallowed up by the sea, all alone. The sage Aravana Adigal and your mother and others went away in safety to Vanji. If you feel angry with the goddess Manimekalai, the guardian deity, you better also remember that she was the cause of the

saving of the life of one of your ancestors who was about to be drowned in a shipwreck, and who lived, in consequence, to do many acts of charity and earn the reputation of being the most charitable man of the day. You will hear about all this from Aravana Adigal." So saying, the goddess of the Isle disappeared.

Manimekalai and Punyaraja were overcome with grief, on hearing all that the goddess had said. They dug up the place thoroughly. There were only some bones left. Punyaraja constructed a sacrophagus of white mortar over them. Then he felt the call to renunciation once more, and again wanted to abdicate and become a monk. Manimekalai dissuaded him, saying, "Your duty and your charity lie in seeing that the subjects of your great island, and of the many islands between it and here, are supplied with food, drink, clothing and residence, and well protected internally and externally. So, go back to your kingdom, oh King, giving up these deluded ideas contrary to your *dharma*." Punyaraja sailed back to Savakanadu after bidding her a tearful farewell.

CHAPTER 20

Manimekalai worships Kannaki

Then Manimekalai flew to Vanji. There she went to the temple of her mother, Kannaki, the goddess of chastity, and worshipped fervently. She was overcome with emotion. Finally, she asked :— "Instead of paying the debt of a chaste wife by either dying with your husband, or putting an end to your life on hearing of your husband's death, why did you take upon yourself the duty of vindicating your chastity? Pray explain this unusual procedure to me."

The goddess of chasity replied to her: "It was a hasty act on my part. Not being able to suffer the calamity that befell my husband, I caused the destruction of Madura by fire. Then the great goddess of the city, Madurapati, appeared before me and told me that my husband's death was the result of our deeds in a previous birth. 'Two princes, Vasu and Kumara, cousins by birth and ruling respectively in Simhapura and Kapila, in the fertile country of Kalinga, began to fight each other in great hatred. This war between them left the border country desolate for six leagues and made it impossible for any body to approach either capital city on account of the prevalence of hostilities. A merchant, Sangama by name, with his wife, eager after profit, went to sell jewellery and other articles at Simhapura. He was arrested by Bharata, your husband

in a former birth and a police official of the monarch, and hauled up before the monarch as a spy. Under royal orders he was beheaded, and his wife put an end to her own life by throwing herself from the top of a hill. It is the curse that she invoked at the moment of her death that has now resulted in the mishap to your husband' said Madurapati to me. The deeds done in a previous birth will certainly bear their fruit. I brought about the destruction of the city by fire. As a result of good deeds done in past births, we are now in heaven for some time. We are aware that we shall have to pay the penalty for this bad deed, the burning of Madura, in future. When our term in heaven is over, we are sure to be born on earth once more, working out our *karma* till such time as the Buddha incarnates again in the holy city of Kapila, in the fertile land of Magadha. The holy one will attain enlightenment under the *Bodhi* tree, and proceed, out of his infinite mercy for all living beings, to teach the Four Truths, the Twelve causes and conditions, and the means of destroying these causes and conditions, and thus enable people to give up evil and espouse good. As a result of our having worshipped at the seven *viharas* of Indra at Kaveripattinam, we shall, when born at that time in Magadha, be prepared for his teaching and will listen to it with attention. We shall be ready then to give up all our thirst for birth and enjoyment, and shall be able to shake off all the twelve hindrances and shall get freedom from births and deaths. Now, my

dear, you must go and learn from the heads of the various Non-Buddhist sects in this ancient city their tenets and principles. When you have done this, and feel, as I am sure you will, that none of them represents the highest truth, go and learn from Aravana Adigal the teachings of the '*Tripitakas*'* of the Buddha, and follow those teachings sincerely and with earnestness. One thing more. Nobody will teach you the highest truths of his sect if you go to him as a young woman. So, make use of the *mantra* taught you by the goddess Manimekalai and go to those heads of sects assuming the form of an old hermit." Manimekalai assented and withdrew after humbly saluting Kannaki once more.

* The Vinaya pitaka, the Sutta pitaka and the Abhidhamma pitaka, the three books embodying the teachings of the Buddha, and believed to contain his very words in Pali, the language he used.

CHAPTER 21

Facets of the Truth

Disguised as an old hermit, Manimekalai visited the numerous *asrams*, mutts and halls of the various Non-Buddhist sects in order to learn their principal doctrines and theories of knowledge. She went at first to a famous *Vedantin*[1] and asked him to teach her the principles of knowledge and the cardinal truths common to all the *Vaidikavadins* belonging to the different Vedic schools. The venerable *rishi* said to her :— "The supreme aim of human beings is *moksha*, that is, freedom from the chain of births and deaths. This is brought about by knowledge or *Vidya*, for it is ignorance, or *Avidya*, which is responsible for all actions accruing *karma*, and landing them in births and deaths. The sole source of *Vidya* is *Sruti* or the Veda (meaning thereby the *karmakanda* and the *jnanakanda*) which was breathed forth by Brahman, and only seen by the *rishis*. The universe, including the gods from Brahma downwards, passes away, but the Veda is eternal and survives the destruction of the Universe, and continues to exist in the soul of Brahman. The *pramanas* or instruments of knowledge are taken to be ten by Vedavyasa, eight by the *Kritakoti*,[2] and six by Jaimini who is follwed generally in modern times. The

1. In those days, there appears to have been no division of *Mimamsa* into *Purva Mimamsa* and *Uttara Mimamsa*.

2. The leading book of Bodhayana.

ten instruments of Vyasa are *pratyaksha*, or direct perception by the eye, the ear, the nose, the mouth or the skin; *anumana*, or inference, from what is directly perceived, about things not so perceived, like inferring the existence of an elephant in a forest by hearing the trumpeting sound, inferring the fall of rains in the hills by seeing freshes in a river, and inferring forthcoming rain from seeing dark rain-clouds in the sky; *upamana*, or comparison, like understanding the nature of a god and goddess by comparing them to a father and mother; *agama*, or taking on authority what cannot be seen or felt by us, like understanding the nature of heaven and hell from the writings of prophets and saints; *arthapatti*, or understanding by association, like our taking a village 'on the Ganga' to mean a village 'on the banks of the Ganga,' and not on the Ganga itself; *svabhava*, or appropriate context, as when a mahout on the back of an elephant wants 'the *stick*,' we understand that he wants 'the goad;' *aitiham*, or accepted tradition, as in the case of a ghost existing in a tree; *abhavam*, or assertion of obvious absence, like the absence of water in a desert, or of coolness in fire; *parisesha*, or inference by correlation, as when, in a battle between Rama and Ravana, we are told that Rama won, we understand also that Ravana was defeated; and *Sambhava*, or inference from the course of nature, as when we infer the presence of a magnet in the vicinity when an iron object moves by itself. Kritakoti recognizes only the first eight, and Jaimini recognizes only the first five and the

eighth, and his opinion is accepted largely nowadays, the other four being held to be covered by the six *pramanas* retained by him.

"In addition to the *Pramanas*, there are the *pramana-abhasas*, or those which resemble instruments of knowledge, like a doubt which leads on to knowledge, like doubting in the darkness whether a thing seen is a tree or a man; mistake, like taking a rope for a snake, or mother-of-pearl for silver; un-understanding even when seen, as a man who has never seen a tiger seeing one for the first time and not understanding it to be a tiger; understanding only the expression, and not the fact mentioned, like the horns of a rabbit; and taking on trust, as when we take a man's statement about the names of his father and mother to be correct.

"Six systems are founded on the *Pramanas* mentioned above, namely, the Lokayata of Brihaspati, the Bauddha of the Buddha, the Sankhya of Kapila, the Nyaya of Akshapada, the Vaiseshika of Kanada, and the Mimamsa of Jaimini.

"The aids to knowledge are tranquillity, control of passions, renunciation of fruits and enjoyment, patient endurance of joy and sorrow, concentration, faith in God by whose grace alone knowledge will come, meditation, and engagement in pious good works dedicating them to God. When true knowledge comes, man knows his own individual soul to be identical with God. True knowledge consumes the seed of *karma*; so that

there is no *karma* left for another birth. There is only one Truth, in the whole of the Universe, namely, God, who is Eternal, Changeless, and All-Pervading, and is One without a second."

"But, sir," said Manimekalai, "your assertion contradicts experience which presents no such unity, no such Eternal, Changeless and All-Pervading God, but rather a multiplicity, a complex of names and forms which must, in course of time, be disintegrated."

"That is due to *Avidya*, or Ignorance, by the individual soul not being able to distinguish itself from its *upadhis*, or limiting conditions, like the body, the physical organs and *karmasamucchaya*. This *avidya* is, like the event in a dream, true only till knowledge or *Vidya* wakes one up to the identity of the individual soul with the universal one," said the sage.

"Sir," said Manimekalai, "some teachers, like the Buddha, say that there is no soul."

"Perhaps, the Buddha intended only to deny the existence of separate *individual souls*, and not to deny the existence of the Universal Soul itself. But, we, the followers of the Veda, do not, as you know, follow the Buddha's views about these matters."

"Can God's existence be proved by *pratyaksha* or *Anumana*, sir?" asked Manimekalai.

"Oh, no. How can the eye be seen by the eye, or the Brahman, who is the knowing subject

in every act of cognition, and therefore *never an object*, be cognized? Brahman is not just a projection of anybody's mind, but a *fact*, like *karma*. In the consciousness that our inner Self is the attributeless Brahman and in the accompanying conviction in the non-reality of the whole complex of names and forms lies emancipation."

Manimekalai went then to the leader of the Saivavadins. He said :—"God creates human beings, as an act of Divine Sport, out of earth, water, air, fire, ether, the sun, the moon, and egotism. He destroys them to rid them of their sufferings. He who is one without a second, is Siva. He gives *moksha*, He is Love Incarnate, He is Lord Supreme, He is Truth. He is neither the formless nor the one with form. He is the Life of Life, the Death of Death. If we see Him, our bonds slip off. He dwells within us, and ever prompts us. The treasure that is sought, the knowledge imperfect, the desire that clings to us, all these are lies. He alone is true. In His grace lies Salvation. He bids us cast off our egotism and sink in the joy of His grace, with all differences gone, and to perceive the state where perceiver, perception and preceived are one. Just as fire in wood, water in fire, taste in honey, fragrance in flower, ether in air, and light in the eye are distinct, and yet not two, even so do the soul and the Lord stand related in liberation. Understand the Lord to be the shepherd, the man to be sheep, and *karma* to be the rope which binds the sheep. God is the Supreme Intelligence. He alone can

snap, by His grace, the bond of *karma*. Say 'I am Brahman' as fervently and as often as you will, you will no more become Brahman than saying 'ghee', 'milk', 'honey', or 'jaggery' will give you the article, or saying 'fire' will burn you. Conceit, lust, anger, greed, attachment and desire have to be abandoned before His grace will descend on us. 'We have given up actions,' declare the vain. Giving up actions is no true renunciation. All the *sastras* will not help one to Salvation, or all the experience of a million lives,unless there is His grace."

She then went to the head of the Brahmavadins. He said, "The whole of the Universe came out of a golden egg brought forth by Brahma, the Supreme Being." For the rest, his teaching was much the same as that of the Vedantin.

The leader of the Vaishnavavadins or the Narayaniyas told her, "The Supreme Being, Narayana or Vishnu, is the protector of the entire Universe. He is of the colour of the sea, and sleeps his *yoganidra* on the Sea of Milk." His remaining teachings were similar to that of the Vedantin and the Saivavadins.

The Vedavadin leader told her, "The Veda is the exclusive source of knowledge and the only means of Salvation. Kalpa is its hand, Chandas its feet, Jyotisha its eyes, Nirukta its ears, Siksha its nose, and Vyakarana its face. The path taught in the Veda is the path of life. After death there are two paths for the good ones,

according as they have the higher or lower knowledge, namely, the *Devayana* and the *Pitriyana*, the path of non-return and the path of return. The wicked are punished by Yama by sending them to the seven hells, and are re-born as lower animals."

Manimekalai then went to the Mimamsaka* teacher. He said to her:—"We hold the scriptures to be supreme. The evidence of the senses is not applicable to spiritual matters. For, the effect of the religious rituals will only accrue in future, and, by the very premises, cannot be perceived by the senses now, as the future is unknown to the senses and undemonstrable to them. So, we have simply to believe what the scriptures say in these matters. According to the *Mimamsa*, each individual has a separate *jeevatma* or soul, eternal, immortal, indestructible and sentient. Wisdom and bliss are its attributes. It can manifest itself only in a body. The soul is glorious and divine in its essential nature, but is clouded over in the turmoils and passions of worldly affairs. When these clouds are removed, by performing appropriate rituals, the realities of its wisdom and bliss are experienced. This is *moksha* or liberation from bondage. Lasting, thrilling happiness is heaven. Prolonged intense pain is hell. The seats of both heaven and hell are within our own body. Both happiness and pain are positive. It is a mistake to think that happiness consists in absence of pain, or that pain consists in absence

* A believer in the *Karma Kanda* of the Vedas.

of happiness. Pain will, of course, never affect the soul which is divine and always enjoys bliss."

"Sir, who has seen heaven and hell?" asked Manimekalai.

"We have descriptions of them in our scriptures," said the Mimamsaka, smiling. "I told you already that, in matters religious, *agama*, or the authority of the scriptures, is supreme."

"Can bad *karma* be cancelled except by our own good *karma*?" asked Manimekalai.

"Brahma, in His grace, can cancel bad *karma*, He being the Lord of *Dharma* and *Karma*," said the Mimamsaka. "The Bauddhas[1] and Nirgranthas[2], who do not believe in Brahma, will not of course, agree to this. But that is only to be expected."

Manimekalai was not satisfied wholly with the teachings of any of these five schools following the Veda. She did not find them conforming to the experience of man or to the teachings of the Buddha.

The leader of the *Ajivakas*[3] said to Manimekalai: "There are only five things in this world, according to our great teacher, Markali Gosala, namely, the four elements, earth, water, air and fire, and life which perceives these elements and the phenomena produced by them. All these

1. Buddhists.
2. Jains.
3. A sect believing in Fate and Predestination, like Calvin.

five have existed from the beginning. These elements exist in indivisible atoms which cannot be seen singly but can be seen when they combine together as in a hill, lake, tree or body. They combine in various proportions and are named according to the element which predominates. Earth is in the form of a solid, water in the form of a liquid, air in the form of gas, and fire in the form of heat, light and energy. So, these elements, by combining, form the solid earth, or fluid water, or moving wind, or warming fire. A single atom cannot be seen except by those who have the divine eye of knowledge. In the shape of combined atoms, as *bhutas*,* of course, anybody can see them, and all of us do see the hill, the river, the bonfire, and the storm. Atoms cannot be destroyed, but can change their form and enter into other atoms. The atom will not split into two, or expand in the same form. But atoms will flow and rise. The atoms, in their combination, are born in six colours, black, dark-blue, green, red, golden and pure white. These colours represent the rising order of excellence even among men. It is by being born white that men attain salvation and escape from the cycle of births and deaths. Happiness and suffering are determined, by Fate, in the womb itself. So too, all our actions good or bad. There is nothing a man can do to alter his Fate, no path to save himself from depravity or to betake himself to rectitude or purity. Beings become depraved

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* Material objects.

without cause or conditions; they become pure also without cause. Our attainments do not depend on effort or action, either of our own or of others. There is no such thing as effective action, or effected action, or indwelling energy, no *results* of good or bad *karma*. All things that have life, creatures and souls, are without inherent force; they are bent this way and that by a capricious Fate which takes no account of merit or demerit. They experience pleasure or pain according to the class they are born in. There are many sorts of births and occupations and many modes of conduct, and many kinds of gods, men and devils, let alone the kinds of inanimate production. There are any number of births for fools and wise men alike, till their wanderings in transmigration are over, and they escape from the cycle of births and deaths, by their good Fate, and make an end of their pain. A ball of string cast forth must fully unwind itself; the chain of births and deaths must similarly be fully exhausted before transmigration is over. Penance and righteousness will make no difference whatever, and indeed, people will resort to them only when they are ordained by Fate."

Manimekalai said to herself, "This is a jumble of ill-applied and contradictory words and tenets destructive of efforts and good conduct alike," and passed on to the leader of the *Nirgranthas* or Jains.

The Jain teacher said:— "The *Tirthankaras*, or ford-makers across the ocean of births and

deaths, have shown us the path of salvation. Their teachings deal with *karma* and the bondage created by it, and the way out of this bondage. There are six fundamental things from the very beginning, namely, the principle of dynamism in things, the principle of stationariness in things, Time, Space, Life and *Paramanus* or Atoms. A thing may exist in its own essential nature, according to its atomic composition, or it may change into the nature of an allied thing. Each thing shows itself to be permanent and impermanent, by exhibiting the three conditions of appearance, continued existence and apparent destruction, three states which appear to be different but are really indivisibly connected. When a margosa seed sprouts and grows into a margosa tree, we see the permanent element in it. But when it ceases to exist, as the tree grows up, we see the impermanent element in it. When green peas are boiled and pounded and made into a paste, they cease to be peas, but the essential nature of peas is not destroyed, and subsists in the paste. The cause of the change in things is called *Dharmastikaya*, or dynamism. It is to be found everywhere, and is responsible for all so-called *changes*. Equally fundamental is *Adharmastikaya*, or stationariness of things, which enables us to identify the things, like the peas and the margosa in spite of the changes. Time, or *Kala*, is the third great fundamental fact. It measures things by the short span of the fraction of a second, as well as by almost eternal standards like the *Kalpa*. *Akasa*, or Space, is the fourth fundamental fact. It

provides space for all the things to be in. *Jiva*, or Life, is the fifth fundamental fact. It combines with the body, or matter, and is capable of enjoying sight, smell, taste, sound and touch. Atoms are the sixth fundamental fact. They combine and form animate and inanimate things. It is the *Jiva* which, in combination with the body, does good or bad *karma*. The result of all *karma* is bondage. The elimination of the causes which cause this bondage brings about *Nirvana* or salvation.

"How is *Nirvana* to be obtained?" asked Manimekalai. "By following the three-fold path of Right Belief, Right Knowledge, and Right Conduct, by purity of thought, word and deed, by strictly observing the vows of non-injury, truthfulness, abstention from theft of all kinds, non-attachment including the discarding of all possession and even clothes, and strict *brahmacharya* or continence, as enjoined by Mahavira, the last of the twenty-four *Tirthankaras*. By doing so, men will become *nirgranthas*, that is freed from the fetters of births and deaths, and will reach the pure and blissful state called *siddha sila*."

"This teaching is similar to that of the Ajivikas and yet different," said Manimekalai to herself. "No wonder, Mahavira parted company with Markali Gosala after some years, since he wanted to give scope to men to improve themselves and betake themselves to the path of righteousness, leaving off the wicked path pursued before. There is no contradiction in this teaching,

as the righteous path may be followed and it is not, therefore, a mere waste of time and energy to define it, as for the Ajivaka Slave of Fate."

She then went to the Sankhya teacher. He said to her, "The two fundamental facts in the world are *Prakriti* and *Purusha*. Prakriti or *Mulaprakriti* is the matrix in which all things appear. It is formed of three qualities or *gunas*, *satva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, purity, passion and darkness, and is inactive by itself and is difficult to conceive. From *Mulaprakriti* arises *mahan* or *buddhi* (consciousness). From that arises *akasa*, or space; from *akasa* arises *vayu* or air; from air arises fire, from fire arises water; and from water earth. From a combination of all these arises the mind. In the mind arises the notion of *ahamkara* or egotism. From *akasa* comes sound, heard by the ear; from *vayu* arises touch, felt by the skin; from fire comes sight, felt by the eyes; from water comes taste, experienced by the tongue; and from earth arises smell, experienced by the nose. The physical organs take up these things: speech is taken up by the tongue, touch by the hand, movement by the feet, evacuation by the excretory organs, and generation by the procreatory organs. By transformation of the *bhutas* mentined above come into existence hills, trees etc. These again get merged in a process of involution, as they come into existence by a process of evolution. In the process of involution all these become one again, and prevade all space and exist for eternity.

"*Purusha*, on the contrary, is easy to conceive, is without the three *gunas*, and is incapable of being grasped by the senses, but is none the less felt by all beings, being all-pervading and eternal. The *purusha* is the conscious inactive principle in every living being, as against the unconscious and active *prakriti*.

"Things understood by the senses are twenty-five, namely, the five elements, earth, water, fire, air and ether; the five sense-organs, namely, the eye, the nose, the ears, the mouth and the skin; the five subtle elements, namely, taste, touch, sight, sound and smell; the tongue, the feet, the hands, the excretory organs, the generating organs, the mind, reasoning, egotism, feeling, and the soul or *jeevatma*. These are the twenty-five *tatvas*."

"Sir, how can *mahan*, or consciousness, develop spontaneously from insensible nature or *Mulaprakriti*?" asked Manimekalai.

"Just as milk exposed to the air turns sour," said the teacher.

"Is there an Absolute Omnipotent God, a Supreme *purusha* who created the world?"

"Such a God requires to be proved to exist. If He were absolute, He would not have created the world. If He were not absolute, he would be incapable of creating it."

"What according to you has been then the process of creation? Is there any unity in it?"

"From the unmanifest *mulaprakriti* came the manifest *mahan*; from *mahan* came the elements; from homogeneous elements came heterogeneous combination; and from inorganic bodies organic beings of manifold varieties and intelligence. There is an underlying unity behind all this multiform existence. Life is the vital power co-ordinating the sensory impressions which are inherent in all living organisms. The sensory organs perform their respective functions under the stimulation of the three *gunas* mentioned above," was the reply.

Manimekalai then went to the Vaiseshika teacher. He said to her: "Matter or substance, falls into nine divisions, namely, earth, water, fire, air, space, the directions, time, soul and mind. Of these earth has five qualities, namely, sound, touch, sight, taste and smell. Water has all these except smell. Fire has all these except smell and taste. Air has not got smell, taste and sight, but has the other two. Space has not got touch also, having only the quality of sound. Sound, touch, sight, smell, taste, largeness, smallness, hardness, softness, tightness, thinness, capacity to take shape and capacity to be perceived by the eye are qualities of matter. One element can enter into another. Since change of form and stationariness are common qualities of all matter, death and life constitute the essence of all matter, and are, of course, qualities of our bodies. All matter consists of atoms which are eternal. A sword kills the body but cleaves

between the eternal and unsplittable atoms which can never be destroyed. Matter may be a solid, a liquid, a gas, or energy or ether, following the five elements, earth, water, air, fire and ether. One and the same substance, like water, may at one time be a solid, as ice; at another time a liquid, as water; and a third time a gas, as vapour. Matter thus changes its form though the component atoms are indestructible. Nature is ever changing, transforming and creating. A solid may be seen, heard, tasted, smelt and touched. When two clouds clash, there is thunder and lightning. The earth rotates and spins and in its rotation, causes undulatory waves in the atmosphere. All this is known to us and can be proved by the wise. But we do not know yet why the sap mounts up the tree, why the flame rises up in the air, why the air current moves in waves. Nor do we know the mysteries of the atom or the *atma*."

Manimekalai thanked him and passed on. The leader of the *Lokayata* and *Bhutavada* said to her :—"There is no God or immortality of soul, individual or universal. Just as when the *mahua* flower is mixed up with jaggery and other things, fermentation comes into being, and we get a powerful arrack which goes to the head, so too when the four elements, earth, water, fire and air combine, we get the fermentation of egotism which goes to our heads and remains there from birth till death. To enjoy the maximum pleasure possible should be the only aim and objective of life. Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you

may die. There can be no resurrection or re-birth after the body has been cremated and burnt to ashes and dissolved into the four elements out of which it came into being. Nobody has actually seen the fifth element, *akasa*, or ether, said to be responsible for the individual soul. We cannot believe anything we cannot experience with our senses. Only *pratyaksha*, or the direct evidence of our five senses, is admissible and valid, even *anumana* or inference being quite unreliable. When the body is burnt, the four elements constituting it disappear, and consciousness disappears automatically, like the sound from a drum which has been dismembered. There are only two states of existence, namely, that which we actually experience, and that which exists at present though we do not experience it. That there is a life after death, and that we are re-born again according to our *karma* is all false, the doctrine of fools, knaves and demons who wrote the Vedas and other books relating to these things for gulling the people and filling their own bellies. There is no God or soul. Nor can the soul, even if the fermentation be called by that name, be immortal. Religious ceremonies for the soul's salvation have been invented by wily priests for their own selfish ends, to cheat the credulous and silly public in the name of God, the Soul and other high-sounding names. The soul can never exist apart from the body and can never, even if it did, eat or do other physical acts after the whole body has been burnt to ashes. Even if it can, ancestor-worship and *sraddhas* are useless. As

food offered at home in the name of a traveller who has gone to a distant country does not reach him, so too food and clothing offered to an ancestor who is dead can never reach that departed soul. So, leave the dead alone, and concentrate on the living. As long as we are alive, we should try to get the maximum pleasure possible. We should borrow money and drink ghee. Though the search for pleasure is sometimes accompanied by pain, and though pain may sometimes follow the enjoyment of pleasure, that should not deter us. Meat and fish cannot be had without bones, or roses without thorns. Only the fool will avoid meat and fish and roses for that reason. The wise man throws away the bones and thorns and appropriates the meat and fish and the roses. All the world, wise men and fools, really hanker after pleasures consciously or unconsciously, but only the wise get them, as they are not deceived by religious or moral scruples invented by priests."

Manimekalai said to herself, "How foolish is this teaching which condemns the *Vedas* and other sacred books, and God and immortality! What will happen if this teacher knew that I know about my former births? Perhaps nothing, as he will not believe in knowledge by inference, and he can never have direct perception about it. But, I shall ask him a question about his ridiculous theory regarding inference."

"Sir," said she to him, "you say that you will reject everything not directly perceived by

the senses. So, will you reject the statements of people as to who their parents are, since no one knows by direct perception who his parents are, and can only know this by inference?", and left the poor teacher bewildered.

Having exhausted the leading sects in Vanji, and not being fully satisfied with the tenets of any of them, and anxious to learn *Buddha Dharma*, Manimekalai hurried to the Buddhist *Vihara* there in search of Aravana Adigal who had promised to teach her this *Dharma* after she had learnt the tenets of the other sects. At this great *Vihara* she met Kovalan's father, prostrated to him, and told him all her story till then. He told her:— "I am greatly pleased to have met you and heard your thrilling tale. Having heard of the calamity which befell your father and Kannaki, and of the destruction of the great city of Madura, I resolved to give up the life of a householder, which was but a delusion, and to become a Buddhist monk, realizing the instability of the body and of all wealth and rank and status. I came to this *vihara* which was constructed by one of your remote ancestors on this spot where some *Dharmacharanas* had alighted on their way back from worshipping the Buddha pedestal and foot-prints in the hill of *Samanoli*, in Anuradhapura, in Lanka. The great Chera King, Imayavaramban, who had planted his flag on the Himalayas, was resting at this place in a grove along with his queens when the *charanas* came. On seeing the holy men, he went with his queens,

prostrated before them, washed their feet, and offered them food of the four kinds and the six flavours. The holy ones then expounded the *Buddha Dharma* to them. Your ancestor was then a guest of the Chera King, and heard this exposition, and became a convert to Buddhism. He constructed this great *Chaitya* and *Vihara*, of white stucco, with turrets soaring up to the skies, and made this place a great centre of Buddhist teaching, and, having distributed his remaining wealth among the poor and the needy, came and spent his remaining days here as a monk. I came here to hear the *Buddha Dharma* preached by Aravana Adigal. On hearing that Kaveripattinam was destroyed by the sea, I resolved to spend the rest of my days here. I have listened to Aravana Adigal and other great men on *Buddha Dharma.* I have also heard from holy sages here that your father and mother, who met with great misfortunes in their life owing to past *karma*, will be re-born together in the holy city of Kapilavastu, the birth-place of the Buddha, that the Buddha will be born again there, that they will listen to the Buddha's preachings then, along with me too, and that all of us will attain *nirvana.* Aravana Adigal has left for Kanchi, on hearing that Kaveripattinam has been destroyed, and that Kanchi is in the grip of a terrible famine. Your mother and Sutamati also left with him. Now, listen, my dear. Kanchi, beautiful Kanchi, Kanchi of the golden battlements, is suffering from a particularly severe famine now owing to the total failure of rains. Even the holy men

there cannot get a grain of rice to subsist on. You have the magic bowl, the unfailing panacea for hunger. Go at once with it and relieve the suffering there."

Manimekalai said, "Certainly. Not a soul shall die while I am alive and have the alms-bowl with me." She then took leave of him, and flew east, and then north, and reached the great city of Kanchi. She circled round it to have a full view of it and then landed in the centre of it, to worship at the *Chaitya* erected there for the *Bodhi* tree and the foot-prints. Then she went to the grove in the south-west of the city, near the palace enclosure. The Captain of the guard went to the King and intimated to him that the daughter of Kovalan, the purest virgin of *Jambudvipa*, had arrived in the city with the magic bowl, and was waiting in the *Dharmada Vana* outside the palace grounds.

The King went out with all his ministers and councillors, and a large concourse of starving people, to welcome her. He told her, "Either because I had deflected from righteousness, or because the holy men of this place have failed in their penance and austerities, or because the women of this place have fallen from the ideal of chastity, the whole country has suffered from a terrible drought, and thousands are about to die of starvation. But, the goddess came to me in a dream and told me that you would come in the nick of time and save us. We have been waiting for you eagerly. Now that you have come with

your bowl, we are saved. I have also, under instructions from the goddess, had several new tanks and reservoirs constructed in anticipation of rains on your arrival."

Manimekalai had a Buddha seat, and temples for the goddesses Manimekalai and Tivatilakai, erected in that grove. Then she began feeding the thousands of hungry people who flocked to her and were speaking no less than eighteen different languages. Soon, clouds gathered, and the rains came down in torrents, and filled all the tanks and reservoirs, old and new. The famine was over.

CHAPTER 22

At The Feet of The Master

Manimekalai was about to go in search of her mother and Sutamati and Aravana Adigal when they three themselves went to that grove. She worshipped them with betel leaf, arecanuts and camphor. Then she told Aravana Adigal that she had learnt the tenets of the other creeds and sects at Vanji from their leading exponents.

"How did you find them?" asked Aravana Adigal.

"All of them are grand, and represent genuine attempts to find out the truth. But they confound the layman, and create quarrels and misunderstandings.

"So many gods, so many creeds,
So many paths that wind and wind,
While just the art of being kind,
Is all this sad world needs,

as the *Tathagatha** found out and proclaimed long ago."

"There is something in what you say, but, don't forget that you must first answer questions as to what exactly is kindness, and why we should be kind, let alone questions about the nature of life and *Dharma*, and the relations of man to man, and man to the universe, animate and inanimate," said Aravana Adigal.

* The Buddha.

"Can answers be given to all questions? Can they all be direct and categorical?" asked Manimekalai.

"There are four kinds of answers given by the wise," said Aravana Adigal. "The first is a straightforward and categorical answer. To the question, for instance, as to whether a thing that has come into existence, and has thus a beginning, will go out of existence, and will have an end, the answer is 'Yes, it will.' The second is a dual answer intended to meet two sets of widely differing facts. Thus, to a question whether a dead man will be re-born or not, the answer is that he will be re-born if he died when strongiy attached to life and its cravings, but that he will not be re-born if he had not the least attachment to life and its cravings when he died. The third kind of answer is by asking a counter-question for clarifying the issue. Thus, if we are asked whether the seed or the tree is earlier, or the night or the day is earlier, the answer is an enquiry as to which particular seed or tree, night or day, is meant by the questioner, as only then can the correct answer be given. The fourth kind of answer is silence, as when a man asks whether the sky-flower is new or old, since there is no sky-flower. There is a fifth kind of answer the foolish ones give, like that of the eel-wriggler referred to by the Buddha."

"What was the question, and what was the answer?" asked Manimekalai.

'If you ask me whether there is another world, well, if I thought there were, I would say so. But I don't say so. And I don't think it is thus or thus. And I don't think it is otherwise. And I don't deny it. And I don't say there neither is nor is not another world. And if you ask me about the beings produced by chance, or whether there is any fruit, any result of good or bad actions, or whether a man who has won the truth continues or not after death – to each or any of these questions do I give the same reply,' said Sanjaya of the Belatha clan, the typical eel-wriggler," replied Aravana Adigal.

"But, does the Buddha approve of speculations about Brahman, the Universal soul, God etc?" asked Manimekalai.

"No. The Buddha counts all such speculation to be as useless and wasteful, harmful and inconclusive, as counting the grains of sand on the bed of the Ganges. He has said: 'The jungle, the desert, the puppet-show, the writhing, the entanglement of speculation are all accompanied by sorrow, by wrangling, by resentment, by the fever of excitement. They conduce neither to detachment of heart, nor to freedom from lusts, nor to tranquillity, nor to peace, nor to wisdom, nor to the insight of the higher stages of the Path, nor to Arhatship. Such theories are really derived from the hopes, the fears, the feelings and the sensations arising from evanescent phenomena and belong to the realm of hastily-formed

empirical opinions, and not to the higher wisdom or *prajna.*'

"So, Brahma is unnecessary for *Dharma* and *Karma* despite what the Vedantins say?"

"Of course. *Dharma*, or the law, stands as fundamental, whether *Tathagatha*s have arisen or not. But the *Tathagatha* penetrates and masters it, and delivers the knowledge of it to the world in general and the *Sangha* in particular. Hence our seeking refuge in the Buddha, the *Dharma* and the *Sangha*. The wheel of becoming is without known beginning. It lacks a maker like Brahma, or a percipient like the *Jeevatma*. Each consequent proceeds logically from its antecedent. *Nirvana*, not Brahma, should be the goal."

"Will the Buddha ensure *nirvana* for me and save me, sir?" asked Manimekalai.

Aravana Adigal smiled and replied:—

"The Tathagatha is no capricious and despotic God who can confer favours on whom he will, whether they deserve them or not. He has himself said,

'By ourselves is evil done,
By ourselves we pain endure,
By ourselves become we pure,
No one saves us but ourselves,
No one can, and no one may,
We ourselves tread the path,
Buddhas only show the way.'

"Teach me this *Buddha Dharma*, sir," said Manimekalai. "But, before that, tell me how and why Kaveripattinam was destroyed by the sea, and how you and mother and Sutamati happened to come here straight from Vanji."

The sage said:— "Pilivalai, the daughter of the King of Naganadu, gave her tender son, born to the Chola King, to Kambala Setti, the Kaveripattinam merchant whose ship touched at Manipallavam, where she happened to be then, for being taken to his father. Kamabala Setti's ship was overtaken by a terrible storm on its way to Kaveripattinam, and sank in pitch darkness. Kambala Setti and a few others escaped death. Not finding the prince anywhere, they concluded that he had perished. Kambala Setti reported the sad fact to the King who was stricken with sorrow at the news of the shipwreck, and ordered the entire seas and adjoining lands to be searched for his son and heir, and, in his wholetime pre-occupation with this, forgot to celebrate the Indra festival. Indra, therefore, ordered the goddess Manimekalai to destory Kaveripattinam by a tidal wave, under the original understanding. The goddess did so."

"How terrible!" exclaimed Manimekalai. "Has this goddess no pity?"

"Well, don't be too severe on her about it. Kannaki destroyed Madura for a similar reason. This same goddess saved one of your ancestors from shipwreck, and it is in gratitude for this that

your father named you after this goddess, who had intimated to him, in a dream, that you would lead a life of renunciation and purity. On hearing, at Vanji, that Kaveripattinam had been destroyed by the tidal wave, I came with your mother and Sutamati here, awaiting your arrival."

"Tivatilakai, who guards and worships the golden seat of the Buddha in Manipallavam, told me much the same story. Now, reverend sir, teach me the essence of *Buddha Dharma*," said Manimekalai.

Aravana Adigal assented, and said:—

"The leading teacher of this *Dharma* is Gautama Buddha, the sage of the Sakyas. He came to the world when it was in the grip of worn-out creeds and soulless dogmas, and meaningless blood-stained offerings and sacrifices recommended by men of poor understanding, low aspirations, and great ambitions. He came down from the *Tushita* heaven, or the heaven of unalloyed bliss, to this miserable world, at the entreaty of celestial beings, and out of pity for suffering humanity, and the crores of animals slaughtered without mercy by man as offerings to his gods or devils or superiors. He sat at the foot of the *Bodhi* tree, and mastered the four great truths after defeating Mara, and conquering his senses. By this great victory over his senses, he became known as *Jinendra*, or the Prince among Conquerors."

"What are the four great truths, sir?"

"The first truth is that life in this world is full of sorrow, from birth to death. The world is a vale of tears, the abode of sorrow, the ocean of misery. Till we wake up to this fact, we shall not have set our foot on the Path. The second truth is that the cause of this sorrow is the mad egotism and limitless desire of man, and his insensate love of self and lust of life, engendering envies, angers, hates, murders, and blood-stained passions of all kinds. The third truth is that this sorrow can be made to cease by conquering this insensate love of self and lust of life, by getting rid of the evil passions of lust, anger, greed, illusion, intoxication and rivalry, by tearing them up by the roots from the heart, thus stilling the inward strife and laying up lasting treasure of perfect service rendered and duties done in charity and love. The fourth great truth is the noble eightfold path to peace and salvation, namely Right Knowledge, of the existence of suffering, the origin thereof, its cessation, and the way to make it cease together with avoidance of nihilistic, fatalistic and sceptical views, like those of Ajita and Markali; Right Aspirations, namely, the desire to be merciful and loving and to be full of good will towards all living things, and to shed all evil passions like lust, anger, greed, illusion, intoxication, and rivalry; Right Actions, namely, honourable actions and abstaining from destruction of life, stealing, lying, committing adultery and other immorality, and taking intoxicants; Right Speech, namely, speaking the truth and avoiding lies and angry, harsh, obscene,

slanderous, frivolous and vain talk; Right Livelihood, or following an honest and honourable vocation, and avoiding the five sinful occupations of slave-dealing, selling intoxicants, selling meat, selling murderous weapons and implements or poison, and thieving, brothel-keeping and prostitution; Right Exertion, namely, crushing evil and wicked thoughts already arisen, preventing such thoughts from arising, developing and increasing meritorious thought, and keeping thought, word and deed in absolute conformity; Right Mindfulness, or analysing and understanding the inhalations and exhalations of the breath, the thirty-two components of the body, the different sense-feelings, the manifold arisings of the heart, the five physical hindrances, and the seven principles of enlightenment; and Right Ecstasy, namely, the practice of the first, second, third and fourth *dhyanas* to realise *Nirvana* in order to feel one with the world of living beings."

"*Nirvana* must be a very happy, exalted state," said Manimekalai.

"Yes," said Aravana Adigal. "The Buddha himself has said about it,

'Health is the highest thing to get,
Nirvana is the highest bliss,
And of all Paths the Eightfold 'tis
That unto deathless safety leads.'"

"But, when we love our own selves most, is it possible to love others and wish them well?" asked Manimekalai.

"Why not?" asked Aravana Adigal. "Hear this. King Prasenajit of Kosala and his queen, Mallika, went to the Buddha and told him that they had, on mature reflection, discovered that they loved themselves most, and wanted, like you, to know how they could wish well to all the world. The Buddha said then,

'The whole wide world we traverse with our thought,
Nor come on aught more dear to each than self,
Since aye so dear the self to other men,
Let the self-lover harm no other man!
Even as a mother watcheth o'er her child,
Her only child, as long as life doth last,
So, let us, for all creatures great or small,
Develop such a heart and mind,
Aye, let us practise love for all the world,
Upward and downward, yonder, thence,
Uncramped, free from ill-will and enmity!'"

"What are the instruments of knowledge, sir, and how are we to recognise false propositions?" asked Manimekalai.

"*Pratyaksha*, or direct perception by the senses, and *anumana*, or valid inference, are the only two true gate-ways to knowledge. Avoid the snares of absurd and fallacious propositions of holy hoaxes of all kinds. They are of many

kinds. The first is *pratyaksha viruddham*, or contrary to experience of the senses, like a man stating that a sound cannot be heard, (by you but only by him) or a mountain seen. The second is *anumana viruddham*, or contrary to valid inference, like a man saying that a mud pot is indestructible and eternal, or that an amulet made of a common metal is a bringer of luck, or that a human being will not die. The third is *suvachana viruddham* or a self-contradictory proposition, like a man stating that he is born of a barren woman. The fourth is *loka viruddham*, or contrary to general experience, like a man saying that the moon is not the moon (and that the sun is the moon) or that the heart is not the heart. The fifth is *agama viruddham* or contrary to the statement of accepted authority, like a *Vaiseshika* asserting that the soul is eternal against the statement of his own authoritative books that it is not, or a man asserting, contrary to all authorities, that there is pain in heaven or bliss in hell," said Aravana Adigal.

"What is the truth about *Karma*?" asked Manimekalai.

"The great law of Karma is true. It brings about the wheel of causality. Beings are born of their works, and are heirs of their works; their works are their matrix; their works are their lineage; and by their works are they established.

"Not of the like result are right and wrong. Wrong leads to baleful, right to happy, doom.

"The life of each one of us is the outcome of our *karma* in previous births. The past wicked deeds produce sorrows and woes, the past good deeds produce happiness and bliss. Every one reaps as he sows. As sesamum will produce sesamum, and corn corn, and poisonous seeds poisonous weeds, so too these deeds. We know this not, just as we do not know the seeds sown in the night. Man's fate is thus only what he makes it, and is not something capricious or whimsical ordained by the gods. He reaps what he has sown, so much corn, so much sesamum, so much weeds and poison-stuff which harass him and the world around him. If he labours rightly, plucking out the poison weeds and planting wholesome corn in their place, the next harvest will be good. Let him endure patiently the sufferings for ancient evils done, and live in love and truth, plucking out from his heart all lust, anger, greed, illusion, intoxication and rivalry, return good for evil, and lead a pure, just and kind life eradicating all desires, all hankerings, all personal ambitions. Then no yearnings will torture him, no sins will stain him, no ache of pleasures and pains will invade his peace, and he will escape from the bondage of births and deaths. He will attain *Nirvana*, be one with all life, and enjoy everlasting bliss."

"Will he die? Or will he live in his body for ever, as a *jeevanmukta*?" asked Manimekalai.

"He will, of course, have physical death. As the Buddha said to the weeping monks, when

dying, 'Oh brethren, decay is inherent in all component things. So, grieve not. Work out your salvation with diligence.' So, you must forthwith set about your work for salvation with diligence. You must first cultivate the *silas*, that is to say, not kill any living thing, not take anything not given to you, observe strict *brahmacharya*, not utter a lie, not indulge in slander or obscene or frivolous or vain talk, not take any intoxicating drink or drug, not hoard food, clothing or wealth, not indulge in luxuries, not worship Brahma, Surya. or other gods, and beg boons of them in return for gifts of food and other offerings to them, and not perform any bloody sacrifices to gods, devils or superiors. The next stage is *tapas* and *samadhi*. Then will come the third stage of *prajna* or insight into reality which will lead you on to *sambodhi*, or enlightenment, which will secure for you *Nirvana*, or extinction of all desire, and freedom from all cravings, in due course, though not in this birth."

"What produces meritorious *karma*, and what produces demeritorous *karma*? What does the formula *Anityam, dukkham anatmanam* mean?" asked Manimekalai.

"The three causes that produce meritorious *karma* are non-covetousness, love and wisdom. The three causes producing demeritorious *karma* are lust, anger and ignorance. Now I shall explain the formula. All forms, sensations, perceptions, ideations, cognitions, subjective and

objective, far and near, small and great, invisible and visible, are *anityam*, impermanent, as they are undergoing changes every moment. That which is subject to change can only produce *dukkham*, or sorrow, misery, grief. The wise man will not say, 'This is mine,' 'I am this,' about anything which is so impermanent and productive of sorrow. That is *anatmanam*. Thus, the three characteristics comprised in that formula are explained."

"Please trace the course of the Path from Ignorance to *Nirvana* briefly for me," said Manimekalai.

"I will," said Aravana Adigal. "From ignorance arises kàrma-accruing action; from such action arises egotism; from egotism arise ideas of name and form; from name and form spring the activities of the sense organs; through sense organs arises contact; from contact comes sensation or experience; experience produces desire; desire produces attachment; from attachment comes the bond of *karma*; from the bond of *karma* comes re-birth, whether as god or man or animal, bringing along with it, inevitably, growth, age, decay, disease and death, and the consequent pain and anxiety and feeling of helplessness to escape from the chain of births and deaths. Never-ending suffering will be the ultimate result if man does not succeed in escaping from this chain of births and deaths. But, to those who grasp the Four Truths and take to the noble eight-fold

path, ignorance ceases, and with it karma-producing action; with the cessation of such action, egotism will cease; with it, notions of name and form will cease; with the cessation of name and form, the organs of sense will cease their activities; with such cessation, contact will cease; with that, sensation or experience will cease; with that, desire will cease; with that, attachment will cease; with that, *karma* will cease to accumulate; that will mean the cessation of becoming. There will be no more birth, and, therefore, no growth, no aging, no decay, no disease, and, in consequence, no anxiety and no helplessness. Thus this never-ending suffering will be destroyed, and the bliss of *Nirvana* got. If you understand the twelve-fold nature of the chain of cause and effect, you will then understand the supreme truth, and will enjoy permanent bliss. If you do not, you will suffer in the depths of hell. Bondage and release come from oneself. No outside agent, no Brahma, no Surya, no Guru, no devil, is responsible for either. For the bondage, three evils, desire, anger and illusion, hugged by oneself, are responsible. Understand clearly that the whole world is impermanent (*anityam*), full of suffering (*dukkham*), and without a soul (*anatmanam*), and pluck out the insensate love of self and lust of life and insatiable desire from your heart. Realizing that friendliness to one and all, kindliness to the whole world of living beings, and joy at the well-being of all the world constitutes the correct attitude, give up anger. By *Sruti*, or

hearing the blessed teachings of the Buddha, *Chintana* or reflecting on them deeply, *Bhavana* or experimenting with them and visualizing them, and *Darsana*, or realizing them, put an end to all illusion. By these four processes, get rid of the darkness of the mind."

Manimekalai said to the sage: "My heart is still perturbed. The fate of Prince Udaya-kumara still rankles in it like an arrow. His princely birth, his fatal love, his tragic death, these move me to tears," and she began to weep.

"Becalm yourself," said Aravana Adigal.
"*Anityam, dukkham, anatmanam.*
The way by which men come we cannot know,
Nor can we see the path by which they go;
By one way come, and by another gone,
As man to die and pass to other births –
So hither – and so hence – why would you weep?"

Manimekalai became calm on hearing this, wiped her tears, and said with serenity,

"Lo! From my heart the hidden shaft is gone!
The shaft that nestled there have you removed.
Today my heart is healed, my yearning stayed,
And all within is purity and peace.
Lo! I for refuge to the Buddha go —
The only wise – the Order and the Norm!" *

* The Order is the Sangha. The Norm is Dharma.

She then assumed the dress of a nun, and pronounced in a firm voice,

"*Buddham saranam gachchhami!* *
Sangham saranam gachchhami!
Dharmam saranam gachchhami!"

and dedicated her life thereafter to following the noble eight-fold path in order to get rid of the bondage of births and deaths and attain *Nirvana.*

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* I seek refuge in the Buddha!
I seek refuge in the Sangha!
I seek refuge in the Dharma!

Printed at the V. J. Press, Chittoor, Q.H. Cr. 21, Category C. O. 820, P. 1347. dated 4-12-47, C. 1,100.

For ALLIANCE COMPANY, MYLAPORE, MADRAS 4,
Q.H. M.S. 109, Category - B.